

We Are Family
Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12
Colebrook Congregational Church
October 4, 2015 / Proper 27 / Communion Sunday

Today's selection comes from the Letter to the Hebrews. However, this letter is really an extended sermon, or “word of exhortation,” as it referred to itself, that was sent from one place to another, even though it lacks the salutation that all the other letters have. It is an argument that through Jesus, the faithful have direct access to God; and it urges Christians to follow Jesus' example and live as he did, faithful, hopeful, loving, and patient in the face of persecution.

It was originally attributed to Paul, but the early Christians could tell that the style was too different to have been written by him. Many alternates have been suggested, all companions of Paul, due to its similar theology as to Paul, like Barnaba, Apollos, or Priscilla. But most scholars throughout history have eventually made the same conclusion as to who wrote it that early church father Origen came to: “Only God knows.”

It was given the name, “Hebrews” by earliest Christians, even though it is not actually addressed to anyone in particular like most of the other Letters. The reason they called it this then, was because it is filled with Old Testament references and expositions, so it was assumed that it was addressing either Jews or Jewish Christians.

It was written sometime between 60 and 95, because the highly developed Christology needed time to evolve, and it was mentioned and quoted by Saint Clement, the first Apostolic Father of the Church, in a letter dated to AD 95.

The original Greek that it was written in was also very developed, considered among the most sophisticated in language in the New Testament. The author utilized a wide vocabulary and formed complex sentences and rhythmic cadences. Unfortunately, these are things that do not translate.

Hebrews begins with an artistic Greek prose device called an Exordium, a single complex sentence that encapsulates the major themes of what follows. It has alliterations, assonances, and chiasms, but it didn't translate. That

theme of the first two verses is God's speech, and Hebrews constantly refers back to God's Word, either as scripture or as Christ. It is thought that the third verse is an excerpt of an early Christian hymn, about the nature of Christ. And the last verse of the Exordium is Jesus' relationship with the angels.

Then we skip over to the second chapter, where the author quotes part of Psalm 8, which was our Unison Reading this morning, and then reinterprets it, taking the references to humanity not as references to humanity in general, but code for Christ and Christ's relationship with the angels. Then, the author reflectively speculated on Jesus and the nature of salvation. This is then concluded by telling us that because of all this, “Jesus is not ashamed to call [us] brothers and sisters.”

That last line would have been quite reassuring to the earliest Christians. The family unit was the basic block of society, it was so important. Now, as Christianity spread, new converts were disowned by their families. They found themselves alone, cut off from such an integral aspect of their lives, it was only natural that the churches, meeting in someone's home, would start to see themselves as being in a new family. Not by blood, but by something else that they shared: Their Faith. That represented a huge comfort for them. Something “normal” that they could cling to in their new life.

There is an R&B song from 1979 by Sister Sledge called We Are Family. I do not remember when I first heard it, but I always associate it with the finale of the movie, The Birdcage. That Robin Williams movie about two very different families meeting for the first time. The children of those two families, one ultraconservative and traditional, the other not at all traditional, are in love and want their families to meet, and then hilarity ensues. By the end, the Senator's wife reprimands him for putting career above family. When the traditional family goes to leave, they find their way blocked by a legion of reporters. Robin Williams' character comes up with an idea that will get the others out unnoticed. The Senator was flabbergasted that he would even want to help them, being so different from them. The response: They're all family now. And as they made their escape through the drag show, that song plays, and it takes on a whole new meaning in that context. 🎵We Are Family🎵.

The last time I went out west to see Theresa, we went up to Salt Lake City for a steampunk event. That was a bit of a culture shock in several ways, one of which was that the event was only two days long, Friday & Saturday, not all weekend like other events. Since we were in Mormon country, they were not bothering with any Sunday events, because all the Mormons were going to be home with their families. Those of us there from New England were surprised, and when this was explained to me in a rather haughty way by a local, I opened my arms, indicated my fellow New Englanders, and said to her, “We are family!” I then suggested that she join her “steam-family” on Sunday. She politely declined, and stated that what I said didn't count.

When I attend or work at the conventions I go to, there are many types of people who also go there. Some are there for the money, these are the vendors and some of the photographers whose livelihood is dependent on their business, which is selling stuff to the attendee. Some, like me, are there for the art, the artist vendors & other photographers who make the things to sell or instruct the diy-ers, or provide works for the galleries. Last Thursday, after all the community events and meetings, I drove down to Stamford to a fashion convention called RuffleCon to drop-off five fashion-themed photographs I had taken for their gallery show. Some are in it for the

community. Most of us enjoy the community of friends that we make, but there is a portion of attendees, and I have met and talked with them, who feel alienated from those around them in their everyday lives. But because of the internet and these themed conventions, they can connect and network with people who are the same as them. They form new families, much like those early Christians, ostracized by their family and their Greco-Roman society. In the house churches with other Christians who were in the same situation, they too formed new families. They too found the love, comfort, & support that comes with family.

The notion of family is a comforting and loving concept, and many of us strive to achieve that. Family does not need to be just blood relatives. That definitely held true for the earliest Christians. Family is any loved ones. Family is those who share your joys and pains. Family is those who bring you love and comfort. And, through Jesus, WE are all family.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

[Pause]

God of salvation, who sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost, hear our prayers on behalf of those who are lost in our day, receiving these petitions and thanksgivings with your unending compassion.

We thank You for Your blessings, and for the lessons You teach us. We thank You for those You have sent to help us in our daily lives. And we thank You for the opportunities to serve You through serving others, seeing to their needs. We thank you for the generous donations that will help us our neighbors in need.

We know we are not perfect, so we pray for the forgiveness of our missteps. We pray for your guidance to live our lives in more loving ways.

We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those who are burdened, by troubles of mind, body, or spirit. We pray for their unburdening, we pray for their caregivers. We pray for those who are lost, so that they may find guidance. We pray for those who protect us, please keep them safe as they have kept us safe. And we pray that you help us to be instruments of your divine love.

We are reminded of all in world who need our prayers. We pray for the family of the victims of violence. We pray for the refugees around the world, both home & abroad, please see them to safer places, and we give thanks to those who provide them shelter. We pray for those who are enduring drought & famine. We pray for all to have a safe place.

We especially pray for:

Redeeming Sustainer, visit your people and pour out your strength and courage upon us, that we may hurry to make you welcome not only in our concern for others, but by serving them generously and faithfully in your name. Amen.

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,

1:2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

1:3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

1:4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

2:5 Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels.

2:6 But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them?"

2:7 You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor,

2:8 subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them,

2:9 but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

2:10 It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

2:11 For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters,

2:12 saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

Psalm 8

8:1 O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

8:2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

8:3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

8:4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

8:5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

8:6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

8:7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

8:8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

8:9 O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!