

**Text: Hebrews 13:1-8 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup>Keep on loving each other as brothers. <sup>2</sup>Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup>Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. <sup>4</sup>Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. <sup>5</sup>Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. <sup>6</sup>So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” <sup>7</sup>Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

***Theme: Life in Philadelphia***

Welcome to Philadelphia! You might be thinking, “Wait a minute! We are not in Philadelphia. That is 850 miles away from here. We’re in Milwaukee!” But the Philadelphia that I am thinking of is not a physical place on the map. In the midst of the hatred and sorrow of this world, God has given us a fellowship in which we love and peace abound. The first verse of our text is translated, “*Let brotherly love continue.*” Literally it can be translated, “*Let philadelphia’ continue.*” Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” Our text reminds us of what things are like in Philadelphia, which is our Lord’s Church.. Life isn’t perfect here. There are also problems, temptations, and tragedies, but it is a place where brothers and sisters in Christ love and care for each other, and where they have peace and hope.

I. In Philadelphia there is love for each other.  
That love is not just a feeling. It is shown by action.

**People are hospitable.** Verse 2 says, “*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*” Hospitality was a prominent feature of the early church. Many of the early Christian writers encouraged hospitality. There are even Roman documents which remark how hospitable Christians were.

Hospitality is a virtue that is not very common in our society today. People tend to mistrust and even be fearful of strangers. How many of us would ever open our homes to people whom we don’t know?

The Greek word in our text is “*philozenias*, which means “love for strangers.” This verse reminds us of how Abraham and Lot were hospitable to strangers. These strangers ended up being angels who helped Lot escape God’s judgement on Sodom. When we are hospitable, God uses us to bless our guests, but He also uses them to bless us. When I was an exchange student in Germany there was a kind family, who opened up their home to the American students, and they gained a son-in-law. A number of years ago, our congregation began ministry to our Hmong neighbors. When we eat the yummy egg rolls this afternoon, we will reap some of the benefits of that. As I see how our French African members treasure our Lutheran faith and Luther’s *Small Catechism*, it has made me even more appreciative of our Lutheran teachings. You might remember a time when you were hospitable, and you felt that you received more than you gave. There are times when we are taken advantage of, but the blessings that God gives through hospitality more than outweigh the bad.

**Philadelphia is a place of hospitality.** Philadelphia is also a place of mercy. Verse 3 says, “Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” It is thought that this letter was to Christians about the time of the Nero persecutions. Many of their fellow Christians had been imprisoned or killed. Others were publically ridiculed and persecuted. Some people lost all of their property because of their faith in Christ. In Philadelphia we don’t think, “Well, I’m sure glad that it’s him and not me.” The last part of that verse say in Greek, “As if you were in their body.” We feel compassion for one another, and bear each others burdens. When one part of the body suffers, we all suffer, and we work to heal each others wounds. Life in Philadelphia means that we keep those who are suffering in our thoughts and prayers, we care deeply about them, and we do what we can to help them.

Philadelphia is a place where marriage is honored. Verse 4 says, “*Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*” Our world is often similar to that of the first century. Sexual relations outside of marriage are far too common; couples often live together without marriage; and divorce is entered into far too lightly. Marriage and marital faithfulness are often despised. But things are different in Philadelphia. Marriage is held in high honor; relations are reserved for marriage; and divorce is not an easy option. We celebrate anniversaries, and couples strive to have that kind of love that gives them many years together until death parts them. Husbands and wives work to love each other in the same way that Christ loves His church and His church loves Him. These verses have a strong warning that God will judge adulterers, and the sexually immoral. These things has no place in our Lord’s church. In Philadelphia we hold marriage sacred, because it was instituted by God for our good.

**Philadelphia is a place of contentment.** Verse 5 says, “*Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.’*” Outside of Philadelphia there is a lot of greed and worry about money. People fret whether they will have enough money. No matter how much they have, it is never enough. They always want more. But in Philadelphia we know that the love of money is the root of all kinds evil. When we love it, it only pierces us with a lot of grief. (1 Tim 6:10) Those in Philadelphia are content with what God has given to us. We know that He will give us our daily bread, and we want to share His blessing with those who are in need. It is a place of confidence, that even in times of great tragedy God will provide.

**In Philadelphia we remember the example of our leaders.** Verse 7 says, “*Remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*” We are living in a time when people are looking for glitz, even in the church. It has led many people astray, especially as they watch the many television preachers who preach the “Prosperity Gospel.” This is a new and uniquely American heresy, which states that if you really believe and pay your tithes, God will give you everything that you want. Your troubles will be gone, and life will be one blessing after the next. These preachers promise riches and blessings, but are the ones who end up getting rich from their followers. Forget the glitz and remember the leaders who spoke the Word of God to you. Remember your pastors, Sunday School teachers, and others whom God sent to bring God’s word to you. Many of them also lived through difficult times, but the Lord saw them through those times. They might not have been the richest people or even the most well-known, but they were people to whom God gave hope and peace even in difficult times. He forgave all of their sins; He helped them in times of need; and He has given eternal life in His glory to all

who have now left this life. Personally, this verse reminds me of Pastor Bartz, who was about 80 years old when I was a child. I remember him sitting on the small Sunday School chairs, singing his heart out with the youngest Sunday School children as they sang, "Jesus Loves Me." It wasn't glitzy, but he was pointing those children to Jesus as their Savior. That brings us to the final point.

II. It is Jesus Christ who gives the people of Philadelphia His peace and confidence, and fills their hearts with love.

Verse 8 reminds us, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*" The same Jesus who was faithful to all those who have gone before us, will be faithful to us. Life in Philadelphia is centered on Jesus Christ. It is through faith in Him that we become a part of this blessed fellowship. As we think about life in Philadelphia, we can all remember times in our lives when we failed to love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, but Christ forgives all of our sins. He gave His own perfect life on the cross for the forgiveness of those sins. He also guards and protects us from all danger. He is the one who says in verse 5, "*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*" So we can say with confidence in verse 6, "*The Lord is my helper; I cannot be afraid. What can man do to me?*" We can live in peace, hope, and love because Jesus paid for all of our sins, and He lives and rules all things for the good of those who love Him. Nothing that anyone will ever do to you, can separate you from His love.

Every person longs to live in a nice place. There is no place nicer than Philadelphia, our Lord's Church. There is no place where we would rather be than with our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is because our Lord's church is a place of love filled with hospitality, mercy, faithfulness, and contentment. We love each other, because of the love our Savior and shown to us and the certainty of the help and salvation He will give to all of His people.

May God fill our hearts with His peace and hope through faith in Christ, and may He make each of us shining examples of that love in a world that desperately needs it. Amen.

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