

## Encourage One Another

Hebrews 10:19-25; Micah 2:1-2

Sunday, November 17, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Opening Remarks: encouragement and wrath

A key phrase in our text for today is the command to encourage one another toward good works and to meet together especially as you see the day coming. (that's a paraphrase) This note of encouragement stands out in stark relief compared to the other passage that talks about anger and wrath. The concepts of "encouragement" and "wrath" usually don't go together but maybe we need to take a look at that. The wrath of God is not a popular topic, but it is one we find often in the Scripture and in the words of our Lord Jesus Himself.

- pig butchering

If you need to wonder if God has any reason to be angry, just consider the latest work of confidence artists who are stealing the life savings of U.S. citizens every year by means of a confidence scam known rather crudely as "pig butchering." This is how it works. People on social media work to befriend someone and then carefully develop the relationship and build trust over the course of time, perhaps months or even years. Over time the confidence artist offers to broker a deal involving bitcoin or some other electric currency. Once this person receives money, he waits for an appropriate amount of time and then returns the money with extra money as profit. This leaves the victim feeling confident that this person can be trusted with investments and eventually the swindler manages to talk the unfortunate person into investing all their profit, as well as much, or maybe even all of their savings. Once that is achieved, the friend disappears, and so does the money. Authorities believe that the swindlers are themselves victims, having been kidnapped and forced into criminal behavior by organized crime outfits outside of the U.S. Does that make you mad? It should. It makes God mad, and it is nothing new.

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## Micah

The Book of Habakkuk is famous for its succinct statement of belief in 2:4, "the just shall live by faith," but it is also famous for the complaint of Habakkuk, in which he told God that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. Why is that? God replied that if Habakkuk knew what God was planning for those people, his ears would burn. Micah is similar. It is famous for 6:8, which reads "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" That same book has our Old Testament lesson for today pronouncing woe on those who practice, and carefully plan, theft and deception. God knows. He will remember.

- the Day

We live in challenging times, but the people addressed in the Book of Hebrews did as well. They were pressured and persecuted and tempted to leave Christianity; there were numerous other religions around as well. But the writer instructed them, and us, to be consistent in gathering together, literally "synagogy together" especially as they see the Day coming. While that phrase often looks forward to the return of Jesus Christ, here it may very well be the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem, as some suspect that Hebrews was written just a few years before Jerusalem's fall and ruin. It is important to gather together, to learn and worship together, and support one another together and to encourage each other.

Encouragement is the antitoxin for these dangerous times.

Encouragement is always valuable, especially in challenging times, and there are people set aside by the Holy Spirit to be encouragers. According to Romans 12:8, it is a spiritual gift. One biblical example is that of Barnabus, a man who traveled with the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys. Barnabus may not even be his real name, because it means, "son of encouragement." It could be a nickname, if so it was a high complement. It's interesting that Paul and Barnabus separated because Barnabus wanted to take Mark, but Paul didn't think that he was up to the task. Mark had been part of an earlier missionary journey but didn't finish so Paul didn't trust him. He and Barnabus argued and Barnabus took Mark and parted company with Paul. Late in life, Paul would ask Mark to come to his aid and Mark would go on to write the Gospel that carries his name. Barnabus was an encourager who wanted to give Mark a second chance and he was right. Encouragers are life giving, they are life expanding. They help people be more than they would otherwise be.

- Tommy Traddles

I think there is a good example of an encourager in literature in the character of Tommy Traddles. He's in Charles Dicken's classic David Copperfield. Tommy, like David, has a lousy childhood with Tommy enduring punishment for any reason or no reason at all. Despite this, Tommy manages to maintain a positive attitude even while facing the bleak reality of his life. He encourages David and others and perseveres, his encouragement seemingly causes him to persevere and cause others to, like Barnabas, become better people than they would be otherwise. Though given no special treatment or benefits, Tommy studies successfully to become a good lawyer and comes to the aid of several other characters. He is an encourager, and his value shines brighter during hard times. He would have been wonderful to have as a friend during the days of Micah and Habakkuk

- Conclusion

We live in challenging times, and perhaps that has always been so. The Book of Hebrews tells us that challenging times can be times of danger and of wrath and tells us what to do. We must gather together and encourage each other toward godliness and faithfulness. It is encouragement, and the encourager, that is most helpful in times like this. Encouragement is a spiritual gift, and God uses it to strengthen ourselves and each other.