

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
September 10 & 11, 2011  
John Crosby  
Faith, Hope and Love  
I Corinthians 13:8-13**

How many of you remember where you were ten years ago on 9/11? I was sick as a dog. I was sicker than I'd been for the last ten years and sicker than I've been since. I was lying in bed, listening to Laura get the girls up and ready for school and watching the Today show which I never get to see, and I saw it happen. I remember thinking, in my small world how will this affect our church? How will this affect not only what happens in our church but the kind of church that we are becoming? And ten years later I am still asking those questions. What have we learned? What kind of community will we need to be when 9/11 is followed by a war and then another war which never seems to really end? Since then we've gone through three years of the worst economic stuff since the Great Depression, and it doesn't really show signs of stopping? How do we act as a church when, frankly, we are so divided? And I'm not just talking Republicans and Democrats, or liberals and conservatives, or rich and poor, or straight and gay, or young or old, or brown or black or red or white. We just can't seem to stay together in our hearts, sometimes even in the church. What kind of community are we supposed to be becoming *this* 9/11?

One of the good things about 9/11 is, it makes a lot of other things seem trivial. It makes us feel like this ought to be a place, here at least ought to be a place, where for one hour a week we can talk about the things that matter the most and not be killed by the trivia. I thought maybe we should start with our mission statement. In the last ten years we have developed this mission statement, *inspiring all generations to follow Jesus, love others, and live missionally*. Do you remember the Scripture that Sharon Sampson (Director of Communications) used at the end of the video from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13?

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

That was, I think in some ways, supposed to be the mission statement for the church of Corinth. This little group of Jesus-followers in Greece were talking with the church founder, the apostle Paul, and I think that faith, hope, and love thing probably became their mission statement, too,

because the Corinthians wanted to be different. They wanted a new kind of life, this Jesus life, whatever that means. They wanted to love people differently. They wanted to be seen as different people, but they kept getting suckered back into the old ways, their personal brokenness, their cultural brokenness, or even worse, perverting what they were supposed to be doing. So Paul keeps writing them letter after letter and says, "Look at your church. In your church the rich people don't even wait for the poor people before they start eating. In your church you brag about sexual immorality as if that is a sign of life. You talk about who is the most spiritual and you look down at other people." Paul has to remind them that it is not their mission statement that counts. It is what is most important that counts.

We don't want to trivialize this Scripture passage by just putting it into weddings, but we use it in weddings because it is so important. The apostle Paul says, "This is what counts the most. Remember this. Love never fails. Prophecies will cease and tongues will stop. Knowledge will pass away because now we only know part. We only talk about part but when completeness comes, the parts will disappear. When I was a child, I talked like a child and I thought and reasoned like a child but when I became an adult," Paul says, "I put childish ways behind me. Now we just see a reflection, like in a mirror, but at the end we will see face to face. Now I only know in part but then at the end, I'll know fully even as I am known fully. In the end only three things will last. Only faith. Only hope. Only love, and the greatest of these is love. Remember that." When everything else is gone, remember that, Paul says.

I think 9/11 did us the incredible favor of ripping off the mask so we would not worry so much about what color of gym shoes we should wear to school or about our stock portfolios or about somebody who has pierced themselves or tattooed themselves in the wrong place or whose hair is the wrong color or who has the wrong politics. After 9/11 we said, "Why are we living like this? Why are we living this way?" And for a while we stopped and thought about it but just like the Corinthians, we got sucked back into real life. We start to school this week, and you are either back at work or you are trying to find a job. You are back in the rat race. Why are we living this way? Because we get sucked back.

This obviously was on my mind as it struck me Thursday night when the President was speaking to the Congress after they had their little dance about when he should speak to the Congress. I couldn't help contrasting that in my mind with the week after 9/11 when all the members of the Senate and all the members of the House stood on the steps of the Capitol and sang and prayed together. Thursday night when the President was speaking, half the crowd jumped up and yelled in a partisan way and the other half sat on their hands and growled in a partisan way. You get sucked back. We need to be reminded of what is most important. We need to be encouraged. That means we need courage to act a better way, and that is what the apostle Paul is talking about. He might even have been in jail when he wrote to these people, "This is what is most important, don't fight about this. Faith, hope, love." It is not about church games. It is not about sex. It is not about perpetual youth or money, or looking spiritual. Only three things matter. Get those right.

When we had all the kids up here, I thought again of what the apostle Paul said. Remember? He said, "When I was a child, I spoke and thought like a child." Everybody starts out as a child. We play child-like games and then as we grow older, we have to decide what games we will play when we are not kids anymore. Laura says, "You know, honey, men don't really grow up. They just grow old." There is maybe a little truth in that. (This wasn't in the sermon. It's just for

free.) But when am I supposed to grow up? Am I just growing old playing the same games? What is supposed to remain when childhood turns into adulthood? What is an adult supposed to do? Well, one of the things an adult is supposed to do is to have faith, so for a month this fall we are going to talk about faith, faith that trusts and moves us to a place we don't see. Will we continue to be a community that moves by faith? We can!

Shortly after 9/11 we were already in this room, and I was working with our student minister. The sanctuary was already full, but we couldn't figure out what to do next. He said, "I am so distressed that our kids go away by the hundreds on these mission trips and to our camps, and they will worship for hours and pray and sing and listen. Then they come here, and they don't want to sit near their parents. They don't want to listen to the music. Or they just don't come." And I said, "Thank you so much, Kurt. That helps." He says, "No, no, no. I think they want to believe; they just need to hear it differently. We need to change things. We need to have a place for them where they can invite their friends." So over the next couple years, he and the group of folks around him started Upper Room, not just as a place for our kids but for our kids to bring other kids, young adults, to come back to church or who have never been to church. And God blew the thing up. Hundreds of people who had heard about following Christ came to Christ, and they invited their friends. It wasn't just that this place was packed on Sunday nights, it was that God was moving in people's lives. One of the things that made the Upper Room so special was their tag line. *Let what we do in here fill the streets out there.* Faith doesn't stay. Faith moves.

The other day when I went to Costco, I drove past Upper Room's new home. I prayed for them, for their kickoff Sunday, that God would keep moving with them. Tonight we are going to celebrate the second anniversary of The Table here, our next version of a faith that moves to the next generation. When you say faith, it seems so ephemeral, hard to get hold of. It is like we only catch a glimpse of it. The apostle Paul says, "You are walking by and you see a mirror and you look back. You think you saw something and you look back, but you don't see it any more." How do we hang on until we see where we are really supposed to go?

It is not just about faith that moves. It has also got to be about hope, hope that endures. Are we going to be a community that brings hope, that doesn't just say *hang on* and that doesn't confuse hope and optimism? We are not optimistic people. Optimistic people are the ones who say, "The sun will come out tomorrow" when it is supposed to rain. It is not about how it is going to be tomorrow. It is about hoping in something that is deeper than that. Brad is preaching on this tonight. He sent me a quote from one of our favorite teachers, N. T. Wright. Wright says, "Faith is looking at God and trusting God for everything. Hope is looking at the future and trusting God for the future." Faith is looking at God and learning to trust Him. Hope is looking at the future and trusting God for the future even when it doesn't make sense, even when God says to do something that doesn't make sense. Be a hope-bringer.

This last spring I was halfway through my sabbatical when somebody pushed me for an appointment. I met with them over coffee, and they said they had this idea. They were fairly new to the church but they said, "You know, we love the mission thing here, and the student thing here is great. We love the worship and just can't wait to get involved in small groups. It's sort of a 21<sup>st</sup> century church, John." "Well, yeah. It's pretty good...." Then they go, "But, you know, you're really stuck in the 19<sup>th</sup> century." And I'm going, "Well, thank you." Then they say, "No, no, I mean, when you look at social media, you guys are nowhere." Since I didn't really know what social media was, I sort of had to agree. They said, "There is this thing on the Internet called

Linkedin. With all the hype that Facebook gets, Linkedin may be just as important. It is a network that brings together people professionally. What if we created a Linkedin network here at CPC?" And since I had no idea what they were talking about, I said, "Sure!" But then they did!

They got a couple of people together and with very little help from the church started a Linkedin network. About once a month they've had 70, 80, 90 people come here and share hope. Many of these people are without jobs. They network. Many of these peoples' jobs have just gone away, and they need to be retrained and given new vision. Many of these people were saying, "I thought God was supposed to take care of me," and their faith needed help. So for all those things, Linkedin provides a network here that is hope-giving. If you want more information about Linkedin, you can get it at the information desk as you leave. This was a sign to me of hope that endures.

Faith moves us to life. Hope is God's gift that lets us endure the worst, but it is a part that I see here and a part that I see over there. I never get to see the whole picture. That is what the apostle Paul says, right? "I see it in part, and I know it in part. I want to know the big picture." What is the big picture? When will it be complete? Faith that moves. Hope that endures. Love! Love is the big picture. Love that shows up. So we are going to talk about faith for a month, hope for a month, and then at Christmas season, we are going to talk about love that shows up because that is what God's love does. It doesn't come in a sermon. It doesn't come in a prayer as you are falling off the bicycle going "Oh, God, get me out of this." Love shows up from God. The Bible is God's story showing up and saying, "This is Me, and I love you." God's love shows up in the person of Christ when He walks around and loves a small group of people and says, "I am leaving now, but I want you to keep hanging with each other. I want you to be the love that shows up in My Name." Can you do that?

Two thousand years later we are still gathering together and trying to show up with that kind of love. I was driving home the other day and got to Excelsior and 100, pulled off on the ramp, and saw one of those homeless guys standing there. He was holding that sign and I thought, "Oh, man!" I pretend like I don't see him for a second, and then I remember the sermon that I gave. I fumble in the glove compartment because a while back a friend had said, "Don't give them money. You don't know how it is going to be used. Don't look away. They are God's children." So I had gone to McDonald's and gotten these gift cards for just five bucks. This is my last one. I pull it out. I am in the middle lane and when the guy sees me wave, he has to walk over to me. I say, "Here, brother. Have a good day. God bless you." He says, "Thanks, man." He takes it in his hand and looks at it and goes, "Oh, you know, somebody else gave me one of these." It was love that had already shown up. One of you had already tried to show this guy that he was a child of God. Anyway I gave this sermon last night and was literally running out to a wedding reception when this young dad holding his son's hand stops me and says, "I don't know, but I think it was me." How cool is that! God's love showed up to him and he showed up for somebody else. Tiny, tiny little ways.

All fall we want to learn together about faith that moves and hope that endures and love that shows up and keeps showing up. So if your faith is shaky, if your hope needs to hang on, and you are about at the end of your rope, if you don't feel love or you don't know how to share that with others, stay with our community, would you? I'm going to ask the band to come up and sing again what we sang at the offering about being peacemakers, but what I'd like to do is give you an example of love that shows up. This next month we are going to have a team of people from

our community go to Jordan and Lebanon with an organization called Questscope, the intersection of Christians, Jews, and Muslims that tries to say, "How can love show up here? How can we learn together?" I'd like the team who is going on that trip to come forward and stand at the bottom of the steps. Then I would ask, if in the last couple of years you have ever been on a trip out of town, would you come up and lay hands on them? Would you do that? Come on. Come on forward. Here is the team, some of the team. Come on. Come forward. If you have ever been on a team that has gone outside of the Twin Cities or outside of the country, would you come forward and lay hands on these folks.

Faith is supposed to move us. Hope is supposed to give us energy to keep on the journey. And love is supposed to show up. In our names and in Jesus' Name, these folks are going to show up.

Lord Jesus, I thank You that You said You would send us to the ends of the earth. You would send us into places where there is violence and brokenness and fear and prejudice and You would help us, help us to learn to be humble and forgiving and forgiven. You would teach us how to keep our mouths shut and our hearts open and help us to love just by showing up. I pray for these sisters and brothers that wherever they go and show up with Your love that they would sense our prayers and our care as we wish them courage and wisdom and great joy, joy in the journey because they go with God. Bless them. Bless others through them. Bring them back to us not only safe but changed. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*