

Sermon

September 21, 2014

Title: God's Tapestry

Text: Romans 12:1-13

Fueled and Aflame

The Weavers:

They sit in a stone building just inside the outermost walls of Scotland's Stirling Castle, in an area called the Nether Bailey. To find them you have to go out of your way: take the old North Gate that's located behind and below the castle's Great Hall. Walk past the old jail building and the place where the military garrison stored its gunpowder. Then, at the end of the path you come to the weavers.

The outside of the building is cold stone; the inside is warm and cheerful. At the far end of the room three women sit in front of a large loom. Their mission: to recreate an ancient medieval tapestry. When finished, this tapestry will join four others in the Queen's Chamber at the heart of the castle.

Hundreds of threads hang down from the top of the loom, with the finished portion of the tapestry at the bottom. Behind the threads hangs a full-sized drawing, or cartoon, of the design the weavers are creating. The women select a colored strand of thread from a collection of spools beside them, and carefully weave it into the edge of the tapestry.

The enormity of the project is overwhelming. When finished, the tapestry will be almost 12 feet wide. And it is woven out of 105 different colored threads, one strand at a time.

Fueled and Aflame:

So what keeps the weavers going, eight hours a day, for years, as they reconstruct an ancient tapestry? What makes it all worthwhile? What makes them make sure that every strand of thread is just the right length and just the right color?

Part of the answer hangs on the wall to their right. It is there that you see a reproduction of the actual tapestry that they are recreating. It is old, tattered, incomplete. This particular tapestry was found in pieces in an outbuilding, thrown aside as nothing more than an "old rug." Now, it is the guide and the goal for the weavers. Bringing it back to life has become their passion.

Paul understood his, and our work, in much the same way. He saw us as God's tapestries. And he saw our mission to be the restoring and recreating of the tapestry so that it would once again display the Creator's handiwork. In writing to the Christians in Rome he challenges them with these words:

Romans 12:11 The Message

¹¹ Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant.

He has just spelled out for them what God's Love looks like:

- It is real, not hypocritical
- It is committed to what is right and true
- It always respects and honors others

Now he wants to be sure that they put this Love into action. It will be their life work. Like the weaving of a tapestry, thread by thread, it will consist of countless purposeful acts of caring. No one will ever know how much forethought and care went into each of them. No one but the Creator whose handiwork is being restored!

Cheerful servants:

So what is the key to staying "fueled and aflame"? We find it in Paul's command that we be "alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant."

The thing that knit the weaves together in the studio beneath the castle was that they were servants. They were not competing with each other. They were not trying to make a personal statement in their work. They were *reproducing* an ancient image, as faithfully as they could. Their Master was an unnamed and long deceased artist. Their template was a tattered and faded picture hanging on the wall beside them. Their mission was to restore the Master's picture to its former glory.

And that's all they needed to "keep going."

You and I are God's weavers. We have been given the assignment to commit ourselves to the restoring of His image. No matter how long or how hard the work may be, we, like the weavers in Stirling Castle, can be "cheerfully expectant" that one day the tapestry will be complete.

Staying Power

When times are tough:

Paul was a realist. He lived in a world just as broken as our own. His friends let him down. His enemies never stopped trying to do him in. So he knew what it was like to be discouraged. That's why he goes on to say:

Romans 12:12 The Message

Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder.

Paul's strategy for Hard Times: *pray all the harder!*

Prayer means turning to our Creator – the One who designed the tapestry of which we are a tiny part. It means asking Him to reveal what only He can see, even though the tapestry may be faded and torn. Even though entire portions may have been completely destroyed! It means asking Him to show us what to do next. It means asking Him to heal and restore, forgive and redeem. New Creation is His work, after all. We're just servants.

Prayer on the mountain:

The busiest day Jesus ever had must have been the day that began as an attempt at a day off for Him and His disciples, but ended up with the feeding of thousands of people. Sandwiched in between were hours and hours of teaching and healing. So what did Jesus do at the end of that day? He went up on a mountain to pray. Prayer took precedence over everything else, even traveling with His disciples to the other side of the lake.

The hardest day Jesus ever faced was the day that He died for you and me. So how did he prepare for that awful day? He went to the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed. Everything in Him wanted to quit. To run. He prayed that if possible His Father might "take the cup" from him. And it was only through that time of prayer that He found the resolve to face the Cross for a broken and ungrateful world.

Where's your mountain?

Where's your mountain? How does prayer fit into your life? Prayer is what re-centers us on our Creator and Restorer. I remember watching the women as they painstakingly wove a new thread into the tapestry. First, they looked long and hard at the picture in their lap. Then they wove in the thread. And then another long look at the picture to make sure that the thread was faithful to the picture.

Isn't that what prayer is like? It gives us a chance to let God show Himself and His will to us. Maybe all we see is just one more strand in the immense tapestry of our lives. But get that one strand right and we can move on to the next one.

God's Tapestry

Love in action:

It was sheer magic to see how strands of thread became a picture. The finished portion of the tapestry glowed with color. A woman's face wonderfully detailed and modeled. Flowers and leaves, a unicorn's hoof, all practically leaping off the loom. And all of it the work of weaving in one thread at a time.

Paul writes:

Romans 12:13 The Message

Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

Two very practical ways that Christians weave the colors of God's Love into the tapestry of His New Creation.

- Meeting needs
- Hospitality

Showing and living God's Love is very practical work. It goes right to the heart of what's needed right now. It keeps us open to strangers, breaking down the old friend/foe distinctions.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians says:

Hebrews 13:1-3 NIV

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Every time we meet a need or open our hearts and homes to others, we weave a thread of God's New Creation into the tapestry that He is creating.

God's Tapestry:

Our church's Care Ministry is designed to just that. It is a ministry that focuses on practical ways that we can help each other, especially during times of need.

Like the weavers in Stirling Castle, God has a place for you at His loom. He will provide the threads in all the right colors. He will provide the template of what the finished work will

look like. All He asks of us is that we take our seat in front of the loom and weave in a thread at a time.