McCabe United Methodist Church
April 25, 2010
1 Peter 4:7-11
"One More Thing"
by: Pastor Gary Walters

Our scripture lesson this morning is from 1 Peter, Chapter 4, and I'm going to read verses 7 through 11. "The end of all things is near; therefore, be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray and above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling and each one of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks they should do it as one speaking the very words of God and if anyone serves they should do it with the strength that God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever, Amen." The word of God for the people of God, thanks be to God.

We are not that far removed from our cantata which the choir did for us. A cantata is a reenactment or a telling of the passion and as I said, the choir does a wonderful job for us but there are other congregations, and even some here in Bismarck, that have the tradition of doing that as a drama instead. Well one of these churches had a reputation for doing a very good job with their cantata. They would start on it right after Christmas and they would learn their lines and the stage setup was elaborate and was very complicated but the end result was a very impressive presentation of the good news, the gospel, the passion of Christ and that whole story.

Well this particular church had picked a program where the climax was the ascension of Christ and so the dramatic moment…."Lo, behold I am with you always, even to the end of the age" and as he was saying this they figured out how Jesus could ascend up and disappear through the ceiling. That church was arranged a little bit different than this and their alter area was more of a stage and they had the workings up above to make that happen and they had a wench in the back with the pulleys and the ropes and they'd figured it all out. They got to the day and everything went off without a hitch, it was perfect. There was that dramatic moment when Jesus says "Behold I am with you always" and he is almost up to the trap door and about to disappear from view when the wench that they were using malfunctioned. Fortunately the stage hands were pretty sharp and on the ball but Jesus plunged back toward the stage and they grabbed onto the rope and they're holding for all they're worth, trying to slow him down and stop his momentum and inches from the floor he stops. The congregation is hnnnh! And there are the horrified disciples looking at him and the gentleman playing Jesus says "And one

more thing, love one another always." You have to give that guy credit. I don't know very many folks who could keep their composure like that….but one more thing.

There is something of that sense in today's passage. Peter in all of his writing there is kind of this sense of "this might be the last chance that I get to tell you this, so pay attention," this is kind of like "the one last thing" and "make sure you get this right because…."

Well, all of Peter's writings are kind of filled with that kind of urgency. He even starts this passage that way, "the end of all things is near." And, certainly those first disciples lived with this sense of urgency that Christ could return at any moment and so every minute counted. There was something about living with that kind of expectancy that gave them an intensity and a deliberateness about how they lived and what they did and how they used every opportunity that was given because, after all, this might be it. Jesus could come back at any second.

2000 years later we have lost some of that sense of urgency, but, it's no less true. Everything that needs to happen for Christ to come back has taken place. It's not a matter of figuring out the stars and the signs, he could come tomorrow. He could come right now. Or, we could go to him and see him face to face. There are no guarantees in life and at a moment's notice we may be face to face with Christ. So, that urgency is just as true for us today as it was for the disciples then.

Really all of that is just an aside but it help sets the stage for what Peter dives into; because really he has spent this entire letter building up to this moment and this verse. Verse 8 reads "above all love each other deeply" and that is the message of the entire letter he has written.

In the writing before this he really develops what it means that Christ has loved us, that Christ has poured out his grace upon us. So he kind of talks in those great, big general terms in terms of the sacrifice that Jesus made, loving us to die on a cross to buy our salvation. That he would come from the throne rooms of heaven and that kind of glory to the manger and the stable and the humble life of a carpenter in Palestine in the first century. So Peter winds all of that together with some very practical, very concrete type things of what it means for us then to be blessed and loved by God and then how we are to respond, and love, and serve others, because of what Christ has done for us; everything building to this moment.

I'm getting ahead of myself though, because in between Peter says be

self-controlled and alert so that you can pray. In light of this kind of, one more thing, or last moment, urgency, it is interesting that his command, his admonition is to pray, but he sets that up with being self-controlled and alert. We understand the basic idea, but for Peter it had a little bit difference nuance or a little bit different meaning; because that whole idea of self control, we think of okay, I'm going to practice self control and I'm not going to eat that second piece of pumpkin pie covered in Cool Whip even though it would be soooo delicious. We think of self control as avoiding things that we shouldn't do.

All of us being good Christians, certainly there are times and moments when we don't practice self control very well, when we slip, and we mess up, we do things we know we shouldn't, but as good Christians we are not going to enjoy it very long, our conscious gets the better of us and we get back on track. But, for Peter this whole idea of self control had a much larger idea. Not simply of avoiding the things we shouldn't do, but of making sure that we were busy about the best things. See the danger for all of us isn't that we will get caught in some sin and ruin our lives, it happens occasionally and it's tragic, but more often than not what happens is we let the good push out the best or even let the mediocre drive out what's most important. We get so caught up in the day to day stuff of our lives that we forget to focus upon the relationships. We forget to focus on those most important things and our faith and our relationship with Christ.

All of that, building up to this idea of love one another deeply. There is a lot of directions we could go with this and Peter, in his letter, has spelled out in detail what some of those things mean and even in this passage he gives the command to offer hospitality and to use our gifts and to speak as if our words were the very words of God and to serve like our hands were the very instruments of Christ extending his love and his grace to others. We could talk about each of those for weeks, but there is a picture that comes with this that I think we need to get a hold of. The picture really is that of a present. The words that Peter uses is being administrators of God's grace. It sounds a bit dry but it's not, it's amazing. The picture is that you've been given this gift, an "Oh my gosh this is incredible, you wouldn't believe what this gift is! It's everything I've imagined and more! Everything I've ever wanted! It's amazing!" But, its mine and you can't have any. No, no, the whole idea in this picture is that you have received this amazing gift and having received this gift you become a giver of this gift. So, every word I speak is this gift and every action is a part of giving this gift.

I tried to think of what I could put in here that would do justice to the love and the grace of God, but I can't. There is no tangible thing that could even compare, (not even pumpkin pie, not even hundred dollar bills, it just doesn't compare). But, how differently we might talk if we had in mind this idea, this incredible gift that we've been given and

then the very words that we speak and the very things that we do with our hands, we are giving this gift to those to whom we speak and those to whom we serve, whether it's our spouse, or our parents, or our children, or a coworker, or a classmate, that we are giving grace to others. I venture to say it would change the way that we talk and the way that we act and that it would radically rearrange our priorities.

I'm humbled at this image then that comes to my mind when I think of how many times I have received that gift from others and how often that gift has taken the shape of a face, a person that I know, whether it's Tim's voice, and I could say that about a lot of you when you have touched my heart with your singing, or, the gal who was such a spectacular Sunday School teacher for my daughter, or the folks who just by their very words, their very commitment, that word or that action that just touched me in such a way, wow! I was reminded once again of how rich, how deep and how wide is the love of God for me because he used you to give his grace to me. In response, what would I do but take this amazing gift that I've been given and turn around and give it to others. I hope that I could do half as well.

Well, wow, that kind of a gift, to take the grace of God that has been poured out upon us and to offer it to others. It's not just one LAST thing, it's the MAIN thing. That's our calling and that's our destiny. Just as much for the confirmands who are about to come up here and join this church as it is for each of us by virtue of our baptism, by our calling as God's people, by his love that he has poured out upon each of us, he calls us to this wonderful task of joining him in giving his grace away to others, as he has given his grace to us. Would you pray with me?

Lord, we thank you for your love and grace that is so high and wide and deep that we can scarcely imagine. Give us eyes to recognize it and hearts to respond, to look for the opportunities that you give us to be dispensers of your grace to others. In Christ's name we pray, amen.