

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

December 14, 2020

“Uncomfortable, but rewarding...”

Yesterday, about half of the membership at Folsom (to be exact, 174 of us) did something that was unusual — at least for middle class, 21st century American Christians. We gathered, in three separate groups and at three separate times, under a huge “tabernacle” (tent) during a storm that featured cold temps (for Californians), driving rain at times, and winds with gusts up to 20-plus mph that made the tabernacle shake and shudder. The wind chill was around 45°F.

Yesterday, from where I stood at the podium at the northwest corner of the tent, I looked out to see people all bundled up with scarves and hats and, of course, masks. They (you) looked cold and uncomfortable but they (you) also looked like **they (you) didn’t want to be anywhere else**. And something tells me no one who was there will ever complain about the temperature in the building once we get to go back inside.

After the services, listening to the comments, the mood was clearly one of *“I’m glad I was here.”* Later, Brady Rembleski posted a photo on Instagram of his three kids sitting all bundled up and remarked that though they don’t get it now, they’ll never forget this experience. I think he’s right.

Sermon-wise, I had more prepared to preach than I delivered. I chose to preach on unity from Ephesians 4:1-16, a text that easily justifies two or three 35-40 minute sermons to do it justice. But I felt compelled to cut it down significantly, especially in the second and third services. I did that for a couple of reasons. In those two services, the wind was causing a lot of havoc — it was noisy and distracting. I was told that one of the large speakers next to me was wobbly and almost fell over. It had to be difficult to sit there and listen effectively. Also, since our services were relatively short, I wanted to give people time to visit before the next group came in; so I moved “crisply” through the text.

It was an uncomfortable but rewarding experience. God was glorified and the coldness of hour was offset by the warmth of the hearts of those who gathered.

We don’t want to make too much of the uncomfortable aspect of this. David Byrd remarked to me, before the first service, that people in heaven are probably laughing at us because we think this is a big deal. Probably true. And Jeff Clark, before the Lord’s Supper, read Hebrews 12, which speaks of the “great cloud of witnesses” — those Old Testament characters that demonstrated faith in all kinds of circumstances. The word “witnesses” itself means “martyrs,” people who were killed or suffered harm because of their faith. Earlier in Hebrews 10:32-33, the writer says:

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated...

Being a Christian meant enduring “a great struggle with sufferings.” Christians have always lived with risk. Today, there are Christians all over the world meeting in much worse conditions that have nothing to do with weather. For them, getting together like we did yesterday is a matter of life and death. In Nigeria, as we speak, the extreme Islamist group, Boko Haram, is hunting down Christians and killing them and that sort of thing is happening in several places all over the world.

But it’s hard to relate to that in 21st century America. We’ve become conditioned to the twin blessings of freedom of religion and freedom of speech. Since March, we have had to forego our pleasant routine of showing up at a nice, comfortable church building where there are so many people we love that we can’t even get around to greeting, even if we stay 45 minutes after services (which is not uncommon). But Lord willing, it won’t be too long until we have that “problem” again, and I, for one, will never take it for granted.

I know that none of us who were there, in person, yesterday will be tempted to say we “endured a great struggle.” That would be silly. We know it’s a minor inconvenience. Nor are we any better than those who chose, for whatever reason, to stay home and livestream the service instead. Meeting in person yesterday was an “option” not a command.

In any case, as Brady said, our kids will “have a story to tell” about how a bunch of Christians bundled up to meet outside, under a tent, in the rain and wind. And that’s kind of neat to think about.

News

As most of you know, **Trey Cain** is being deployed by the Air Force to Kuwait. He’s scheduled to be home by the end of July. Pray for Trey’s safety and for the rest of the family while he is gone.