



FIRST  
PRESBYTERIAN  
Ann Arbor | Michigan

## Sermons from

### **“Bands of Love”**

The Rev. Evans McGowan  
August 4, 2013 - 8:00 a.m.  
Communion Sunday  
Hosea 11:1-11  
Luke 12:13-21

Band of Brothers is a book by Stephen Ambrose that was also made into a TV miniseries produced by Stephen Spielberg and Tom Hanks. Both are based on the firsthand accounts of “Easy Company,” these brothers an experimental airborne regiment that parachuted into hostile territory and assigned to the US Army 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. Both the books and the miniseries explore the stories of the men of Easy Company and their involvement in key battles during World War II, particularly the invasion of Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge. “Band of Brothers” comes from Shakespeare’s Henry V’s:

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother;

Together these men became brothers. There was nothing ‘easy’ about Easy Company, yet friendships are forged through the trials of battle and being far away from home and family.

In scarcity and in need, we humans can respond well, helping each other out and supporting where needed. Yet the pain of impoverishment and fear in frugality can also lead us to stick to our own and not share with others. In the chilling movie *Winter’s Bone*, a desperately poor Appalachian family is starving with their father nowhere to be found. The kids see their neighbors skinning a deer. A little one asks his older sister, played by Jennifer Lawrence.

Sonny: Maybe they’ll share some of that with us.  
Ree: That could be.

Sonny: Maybe we should ask.

Ree: Never ask for what ought-a be offered.

“Never ask for what ought to be offered.” In a culture clinging to some sense of honor and shame, is it pride that sometimes blinds us from receiving help? Is this part of our American culture, to each her own, to earn your share or sit down and be quiet?

In times of scarcity, perhaps we can understand not sharing or holding back. But in times of abundance, four years after the recession, are we still looking to our own and how we reward ourselves rather than the other? Our society has done great things for those in need. It’s said that 25 million people would fall into poverty if it were not for Social Security, many of them elderly and differently abled. We have 47 million people on food stamps now. Many are benefitting from the social nets of our society, and yet our lawmakers are proposing cutting 20 billion dollars out of these food stamps, and possibly another 20 more. We are told that CEO pay has risen by 40 percent since 2009. Meanwhile, fast food workers are striking for raising the minimum wage.

To each his own. Does that really work? Is that really just? Is that how we want to live as a society? Is that how God wants us to live?

The prophet Hosea reminds us that God is a compassionate God. Like a parent lifting an infant, so God lifts us up in life and sustenance, supporting us when we fall. God teaches them to walk and heals them, yet they turn away from God and do not give thanks or obedience to the one who takes care of them. Yet God is not a human being. God’s passion, God’s compassion, goes beyond the turn of the heart and floods the heart. That in spite of our actions of indifference or hatred to one another, God loves us beyond reason, withholding punishment or anger, and gives us an example of what it means to show mercy and to walk humbly with each other. God refuses to judge us, and yet sets forth an example of what does it mean to love.

And, as we read in Luke, even God’s son refuses to be judge. A man comes up to him and says, “Can you not make a judgment between me and my brother?” And Jesus says, “Friend,” which is interesting. Not citizen or someone who is subordinate, but an equal. “Friend, who sent me to be judge?” Have you not read Hosea, I can hear Jesus say, where God refuses to be judge. How can I be judge? He talks again about how

one's life does not consist of the abundance of possessions, and goes on to tell a parable; a parable that really contrasts two thoughts: the thoughts of the human being, the land of the rich man, and that of God. The human being asks the question, "What should I do in the face of abundance? What should I do because I have no place for my possessions?" The question starts with himself. Yet God has a different question: "Of all the things you have prepared, of all the things you have received, whose will they be?" God does not make the assumption that the rich man does: that these possessions are his. What will I do? Because as soon as we start in that place that "this is mine" we end up tearing down our smaller houses and going big, building up larger so I can store up everything. God asks, "Whose are they? These gifts you have received, whose are they? Where have they come from? Where are they going?"

Several years ago I lived in Kenya for a year, volunteering with Church World Service. In one such area there was fighting over abundant land in the Rift Valley, the cradle of civilization. Those in power gave their own tribe rights to the land even though other people were already living there. Judges looked away as gangs raided each others' homesteads and crops, scaring off the people so that they could take the land. It was horrible to see such neighbor on neighbor violence. It was wrong. But how could we come in and be judge?

Church World Service constantly struggles to help in these contentious situations, and yet not called to be judge. In this particular situation, we brought the leaders together to negotiate peace. As the third party, we held the space and gave abundantly so that people could rebuild their homes and replant their crops. One member of the community said, "As people begin to understand the cost to their security, possessions and lives," they will start planting the seeds of hope. They will no longer see each other's possessions as their own, but as a gift from God. Together we cultivate the fragile bed of peace. Together we water these seeds of hope.

How are we watering the seeds of hope in our own life? How can we see that what is needed for growth – the water, the sunshine, the fertile soil – is more than we can give? How can we not take ownership and realize all is a gift from God?

Possessions can easily determine an outcome of a situation. Whether it's possessing the land in the Rift Valley, whether it's trying to possess the land in Normandy, in all

these places we are striving to get to place where we can have peace. Yet when we are focused on possessing what is our own, we miss the boat. ‘To whom will your possessions go?’ God asks the rich man. How can we give now? How can we actively see our neighbor as a friend and not a foe?

For it is in sharing that we forge the bands of love, the cords of human kindness. May we become bands of brothers and sisters by reaching out, by forming these bonds of relationship and not isolating ourselves in our own silos. For it is in this unity of love that we find Christ. Christ is not the one who stands aside, who judges us from afar. No, Christ is the one in our midst who is sharing and modeling love for one another. Christ is the very cord of our human kindness, watering these seeds of hope. How might we give of this love? How might we receive this love? How might we commune with God in the giving and the receiving, and thus forge these bands of love?

In God’s Grace, in God’s love, Amen.

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