

A Word on Wednesday from Pastor Tonia

"Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow" - June 22, 2022

Now, may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in every way.

The Lord be with you all. (II Thessalonians 3:16)

Paul had a way with words. He made poetry out of saying good-bye. There was comfort and sorrow. Though in your heart there was the desire to not see him depart, his words were ones of encouragement which made you believe you could continue after he left.

Paul's words of parting were always a prayer for peace and grace upon those whom he was leaving. Prayers for continued faith and good works. His love and concern for them was palpable in his parting words. His message to the early church, still gives us peace and comfort, still offers us God's grace and strength to continue, to face what is before us, to deal with our losses, to witness to the love, mercy, and goodness of God.

We have so many good-byes in life, we've lost friends, loved ones, pets. Many are facing losses now, following the floods this month. We face a fear of another loss – whenever we lose something or someone we wonder "How much more can I lose, how much more can I handle." Truthfully, none without God.

Parting, losing, saying good-bye always makes good drama. There is heartbreak, fear, sorrow, love. "Parting is such sweet sorrow," Juliet says to her Romeo. Not wanting him to leave, we can feel her love and the pain of separation.

In Acts 20 we read not Paul's parting words, but those of the ones left behind, "And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, because they feared they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship." (Acts 20:37-38) One can feel their pain, recognize their loss, identify with their grief.

It's never easy to say good-bye. Each loss seems to leave a hole in our heart. But each person, each place, each circumstance, any loss, helped us to be the person we have become. Where we've been, prepares us for the new thing which is just around the corner. A new relationship, a new encounter will come and fill that hole. Will do its part in forming us. Will create another memory – and we have room for many.

"Life is made of ever so many partings welded together." So says Blacksmith Joe to Pip in "Great Expectations." Words of wisdom. Life is filled with so many good-byes. Friends and loved ones leave. Situations are left behind. Good times, great places become but a memory. Those who are such a part of our lives are suddenly gone.

We are reminded of the times Paul bid adios to the churches he had formed, the life-long friends he had made, the body of Christ he had nourished, those with whom he had struggled, those with whom he had experienced God's presence, those he would never see again in this world.

His memories, his words, the experiences, the highs and lows, have been captured in his letters and we use them still today for instruction, for worship, for prayers, and for blessings. They laid out a new way, it was not always easy or smooth sailing, but Paul wrote it out so it

would not be lost but could be a blueprint for how we are to live and serve God, how we are to look at life and love, how we are to give thanks and praise.

Leaving and losing is never easy. We've shed tears as we moved to a new town, at the end of a relationship, at the death of a loved one, as we watched our possession float down a flooded river. Each a loss, leaving a hole in our hearts.

Last week I lost my faithful companion, Dutch. Many of you have seen Dutch on my Wednesday video's, he loved being on TV. He died too soon, but then any time would have been too soon. I'd told him he had to live forever, but that's just not how life rolls. I've lost much, as have we all, the freshest loss seems to hurt the worst. Each time we say, "I can't live through this or without them." But the Holy Spirit comes along side us, and God strengthens us to go. To rebuild, restore, reimagine. We are given the ability to continue. There's still a hole in our heart, but it will heal – eventually.

We will go on. The Paul's in our lives may never return, but their words, the memory of them, the good meals shared, the laughter, the learning, the late nights talking, enjoying the sunrise, dreaming of tomorrow will remain with us. We eventually find what we need to continue after our goodbye, after our loss. And it, too, will become a memory which forms us and fashions our future, which shows us how to say good-bye, seeking God's peace and grace for those we love and care for.

Please pray with me. God of goodness, You come to us in our darkness, in our times of loss, when we hurt and do not think we can continue. Your Spirit comes to us with grace, mercy, and strength. You fill us with love. You dry our tears. We stand together as Your children offering support, a shoulder to cry on, and arms to help rebuild. We go on because we have been called to go out, to experience Your love and presence – even when we do not think we can. Thank You for the comfort You give to us when we have to say good-bye. Now may we rest in hope and know the fullness of joy in Your presence. **Amen**