

Post Scripts
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16
August 28, 2022
First Presbyterian, Luling

Back in the dark ages when I was a little girl, I was taught to write letters. I received stationery from a favorite great-aunt for my birthday one year, and the clear expectation was that I was supposed to write letters to her. That was no hardship. I adored her. She was quirky in all the best ways a kid could imagine. We loved to visit her, and we loved for her to visit us. I would write her letters, especially in the summer when I was otherwise bored, about who knows what. Nothing, really. We went swimming at the neighbor's house. It rained a little bit. Mama worked in the flowerbeds. My brother and I were playing with legos. Important stuff.

The stationery was not even a full size piece of paper. I can still see it in my mind's eye—a light yellow color, with an illustration at the top of a small house in a field of pink wildflowers and a blue sky. With my little-kid-sized handwriting, I didn't have to have too much to say to fill up a whole page.

And then I discovered the magic of P.S. I don't remember where I learned about P.S.; I suspect that same great-aunt used it at the end of one of her letters back to me. Post Script. In theory, something you forgot to include in the body of the letter, remembered it after you had signed, so you add it to the bottom of the letter, with the abbreviation P.S. In theory. Because I so loved the idea of P.S., that I intentionally left things out of the letter, just so I could have a P.S. And then a P.P.S.

I can't remember the last time I wrote a handwritten letter. Most of my correspondence is emails, and even if it's something I'm going to print out, I can always go back and add in my forgotten thought. But sometimes, just for the fun of it, or if it's something unrelated to the real subject of the letter, I'll include a P.S.

The book of Hebrews is a bit hard to categorize. We think of it as one of the letters in the New Testament, stuck as it is in the midst of letters. But it doesn't really fit the pattern or structure of an ancient letter. It looks more like a long sermon. This final chapter, 13, that we read from today, contributes to the confusion. Some people say, this whole chapter was clearly added on later by someone else entirely different from the author of the sermon. Others say, no, it maybe added on later, but it was just so the sermon could be turned into a letter and sent around to various churches. Who knows. But to the non-expert, just reading through, this chapter sure seems like a P.S. or several.

Most of Hebrews is a long and complicated theological and scriptural discourse. And then the P.S. abruptly says: "Let mutual love continue!" Love one another. Definitely something you don't want to forget to add to your letter. OK.

P. P.S. "Don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers." That love that you are sharing with one another, inside the community, can't stay just within the community. It needs to flow outward, too.

Oh, and one more thing. P.P.P.S: Remember those who are in prison and being mistreated. That love that you're sharing within and without the community needs to flow all the way to the margins of your society.

P.P.P.P.S. Hold marriage in honor by all. Yes, yes, good advice.

Not finished yet.

We're now up to five P.'s and an S: Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have. God isn't going to leave you. Keep trusting God to provide.

And another, six P.'s and an S: Remember your leaders and imitate them. It seems like enough time has passed in this Christian community that its founding members and leaders had died. The writer of Hebrews is encouraging them to remember their past leaders.

And then this next sentence as another P.S., and it's not clear to me if this was meant to be attached to the "remember your leaders" instruction or not. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

The verses that the our reading skipped are a restatement of some of the earlier chapters in Hebrews, a way to connect Jesus to the sacrificial worship system of the Old Testament. I guess a "in case you didn't get it the first time, I'm going to restate this one more time right here at the end."

We're at 8 P.'s and an S: Let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise, do not neglect to do good and share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

That's where our reading stopped. 8 P.S'es. Last minute things the author wants to be sure to include. It goes on from there with a few more.

A bunch of the commentaries I read this week tried to pull all of these instructions together under one theme or guiding principle or even an outline. They tried hard, but it isn't easy. I don't think they were intended to be that kind of instruction, with a clear line of argument from point A to B to C. I really think they are sort of a list of P.S.es, some

parting thoughts that the author wanted to be sure to include that didn't quite fit with the rest of the communication. Possibly even some thoughts the author intended to save till the very end, to give them a place of prominence, so they wouldn't get lost in the shuffle of all the other words and complications.

It's pretty common in the New Testament letter for there to be a closing set of instructions along these lines, so this isn't some sort of wild innovation, but what this author chooses to include is plenty enough to keep the audience occupied. It's plenty to work on to build and strengthen their Christian community.

The instructions hold value for our own Christian community. Love one another within the community and let that love extend outside the community, even to those on the very margins. I think that's something we do pretty well, though of course there's always room for improvement.

Honor marriages. We do. And honor family and human relationships of all kinds. I think we also know, based on our own experiences and knowledge, that our own relationships can always use improvement and work.

Remember to be content with what we have, because God has promised never to leave us or forsake us. That's easy for most of us to say, because we have enough, more than enough, to be content with. We sometimes forget to trust God's provision because we've been able to provide for ourselves. Let's keep in mind that it's hard to be content and trust God to provide when we don't have enough. And let's remember to be God's provision for those who are in need.

Keep in mind where you've come from, who has been faithful in leading us, trusting our whole community to Jesus Christ, who was here before we were called together, and will be here after we are all gone. This I think we're pretty good at.

And then, like Columbo, "oh, one more thing," which always ended up being the most important thing, the crucial piece to solving the mystery. The "one more thing" that ends our reading: let's worship together, which includes doing good and sharing what you have, inside and outside of the community.

It's a bunch of P.S.es, for what is already a lengthy communication, but they're all important for strengthening and nourishing the community of faith, yesterday, today, and forever.