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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THREE GIFTS”
Jude 1-3, 20-25

My ten week sabbatical begins tomorrow. I will not be in this pulpit again until September. Today, I want to bless you with three gifts from the Book of Jude.

✍ The first gift is encouragement.

☐ Please turn with me to Jude 1 (Jude is short enough that it has no chapter divisions, only verses): **“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James. To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ.”**

We who are Beverly Covenant **“have”** also **“been,”** are being, and will be **“called.”**

🔔 God the Father has called us: to **“be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and... belief in the truth”** {2 Th 2:13-14}; to enter **“into his kingdom and glory”** {1 Th 2:12}; to enjoy his presence {Heb 3:1}; **“to be conformed to the likeness of [God] the Son”** {Ro 8:28-29}; **to live “a holy life”** {2 Ti 1:9}; to **“make disciples”** {Mt 28:16-20}; to endure suffering as we **“follow in [the Messiah’s] steps”** {1 Pe 2:21}; and so on.

☼ I invite us to absorb this encouraging truth: God Almighty, the Creator and King of the Universe, **“who was, and is, and is to come”** {Rev 4:8}, the perfect One to whom the angels sing **“Holy, holy, holy”** {Is 6:3} has called, is calling, and will continue to call us. Us!

That is not all. We who are Beverly Covenant Church are also **“loved by God the Father.”**

🔔 You and I could give witness to the Father’s love for a lifetime, and never run out of fresh things to say. **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this”** above all: **“While we were still sinners,”** when our **“sinful [minds] [were] hostile to God”** **“Christ died for us.”** It was precisely **“When we were God’s enemies”** that **“we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son”** {Ro 5:8; 8:7, 5:10}.

☼ I invite us to absorb this encouraging truth: Jesus is **“in very nature God,”** yet he **“made himself nothing, [took] the... nature of a servant ... and became obedient to death”** {Php 2:5-8} for us – not because we are so gosh-darn lovable, but because God is so astoundingly full of love. God has loved, still loves, will always love us.

And that is not all. We who are Beverly Covenant Church are also **“kept”** (meaning **protected** and **preserved**) **“by”** for, and in **“Jesus Christ.”**

🔔 Everyone in this family has been severely tested by hard circumstances and broken relationships. We have been assaulted by **“spiritual forces of evil”** {Eph 6:12}, by human foes, even by people we called “friend.” Often we have been our own worst enemies: seeking freedom in that which enslaves, looking for wholeness in things that do not satisfy, failing to love God and each other. We have been tempted to give up, give in, and go under. Yet the Lord of the Church has kept us.

☼ I invite you to absorb this encouraging truth: **“He who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion”** {Php 1:6}. Despite our weakness he **“is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or**

imagine, according to his power that is at work within us {Eph 3:20}. The Son has kept, is keeping, and will always protect and preserve our faith, hope and love.

☐ Moving on to Jude 2, we read: **“Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.”**

Lord God, we are grateful for the mercy you have lavished on us! Thank you, for **“not [treating] us as our sins deserve or [repaying] us according to our iniquities”** {Ps 103:10}. Help us to receive your sweet mercies day by day. Refill us with a fresh outpouring of your Spirit, so that we will increasingly be a community in which the guilty receive pardon, the stained receive cleansing, and the broken receive healing.

Lord God, we are grateful for the peace you have lavished on us! Thank you that **“we have peace with [you] through our Lord Jesus”** {Ro 5:1}. May your unfathomable peace **“guard [our] hearts and [our minds]”** {Php 4:7}. Refill us with a fresh outpouring of your Spirit, so that as we **“Live in harmony with one another”** {Ro 12:16} we might increasingly help our neighbors to become reconciled to you and to others.

Lord God, we are grateful for the love you have lavished on us! Thank you, that we are **“being rooted and established in love”** {Eph 3:17}. Refill us with a fresh outpouring of your Spirit, to that we **“may have the power... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love”** {Eph 3:18-19a}, so that we might increasingly love you **“with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] strength and with all [our] mind”; and ‘Love [our] [neighbors] as [ourselves]’”** {Lk 10:27}.

“The word of God is living and active” {Heb 4:12}. It has dynamic power to accomplish God’s purposes now and into eternity. This book was not written directly *to us*, but it was written *for us*. We who are Beverly Covenant **“have been called... are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus: Mercy, peace and love”** are already ours, and will be in greater **“abundance.”** *Have we been encouraged?*

✍ My first gift to you today is encouragement. The second is exhortation.

☐ Jude 3: **“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”**

📖 Επαγωνιζομαι (epagoonitzomai), translated **“contend,”** is a forceful word that literally means *to strive* or *to fight*. It is used in the N.T. to describe human conflict, the struggle against impersonal obstacles and dangers, and the battle against one’s weaknesses.

What does the text say? ‘Contend for faith’? No. ‘Contend for your faith’? No. Jude writes, **“contend for the faith.”** His carefully chosen words have several significant implications. Let me draw your attention to two of them.

🔔 Implication: Christian faith is not a subjective feeling; it has objective content. Furthermore, that content is not up for grabs; it is determined by the apostolic witness.

Faith that is **“the faith”** is **“the faith that”** God **“entrusted” “once for all” “to the saints.”** It takes its

shape, substance and life from the apostolic witness contained within the Old Testament as handed on by Israel, and the N.T. as fixed by the Council of Carthage.

🔔 Implication: God gives us Christian faith, not primarily for our benefit, but that we might steward it on his behalf.

Faith that is “**the faith**” is “**the faith**” for which we contend even when it is tedious or tough, even when it requires significant self-denial, even when it provides no material or social benefit, and even when it exposes us to mockery or mistreatment. We are in this to glorify God, not ourselves.

☐ Moving on to Jude 20-21 we read: “**But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.**”

↕ We contend for the faith by cultivating righteousness in vertical relationship with God.

Notice the mutual quality of our interaction: it is God who has “**entrusted**” the “**most holy faith**” to us – yet we are accountable to “**build [ourselves] up in [that]... faith**”; it is God who “[pours] **out [his] Spirit**” into us {Ezek 36:27} – yet we are accountable to “**pray in the Holy Spirit**”; it is God who loves us perfectly (in fact, the only reason we are able to exercise αγάπη (agape) love is “**because he first loved us**” {1 Jn 4:19}) – yet we are accountable to “**keep ourselves in God’s love.**” God initiates and energizes our relationship with him; even so, we must respond in trust and obedience if our relationship is to flourish.

☐ And then Jude 22-23: “**Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.**”

↔ We also contend for the faith by cultivating righteousness in horizontal relationship with others.

☆ Surely, some are “**saved by grace, through faith**” {Eph 2:8} without any church connection. Some do grow in knowledge and particular aspects of holiness apart from human interaction. But I assert that we cannot rightly “**contend for the faith**” in isolation from the saints.

“**The faith... was... entrusted to the saints.**”

The sense here is not of a disjointed group of detached individuals, but of a cohesive, united body. Not only so, “**the faith**” is inextricably bound to both the (intensely) communal hope that God’s kingdom will “**come on earth... as it is in heaven**” {Mt 6:10}, and the (intensely) communal love for God and neighbor.

We contend for the faith together by “[admonishing] **the idlers**, [encouraging] **the faint-hearted**” and “[helping] **the weak**” {1 Th 5:14} – and, of course, by receiving admonition, encouragement and help when the shoe is on the other foot.

“**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man [woman] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work**” {2 Ti 3:16-17}. We who are Beverly Covenant are being

called and equipped “**to contend for the faith.**” *Have we been exhorted?*

✈ My first and second gifts to you today are encouragement and exhortation. **The third is exaltation.**

☐ I will not expound at length on Jude 14-25, but as I read, listen with this in mind: God has chosen to manifest and multiply his divine attributes in and through “**his holy people**” {2 Th 1:10}, the followers of Jesus who serve as Christ’s body on earth until he comes in the flesh.

We have the privilege of amplifying “**the glory, majesty, power and authority of God**” to the world, by what we think, say, and do in relation to God and neighbor. May these words come true in our lives: “**To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.**” *Has God been exalted?*

Encouragement, exhortation, and exaltation from the Book of Jude. This is what I leave with you, until we are reunited in September.