

But, like the Mack Truck Company, we know that the church is good for carrying stuff. Today's passage from Hebrews reveals that the essence of what the church does is carry cargo. We get this mission from Jesus Christ, the one who was the prototypical trucker - the Savior who took the heavy load of our guilt upon himself and hauled the full weight of our sins into oblivion.

Because Christ *offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins* (10:12), we don't have to haul that particular load any longer. We can fly past life's weigh stations and blow through life's tollbooths.

But still the Church's call is to carry cargo. The Church is not a finely tuned sports car or a luxuriously appointed sedan; the Church really is a mud-flapped, roll-barred, banged-up, load-hauling truck. We use this vehicle to drive ourselves to God in faith and worship (vv. 22, 25), to carry forward the full weight of our hope (v. 23) and to do the hard work of helping others in a spirit of love (v. 24). Our job is to perform good deeds, meet together regularly, encourage one another and do whatever we can to help each other function in love as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps it's time, on this Maundy Thursday, to confess we have not been a truckin' church. We haven't carried out our responsibilities to lift up the oppressed, to bring hope to the hopeless and to bear one another's burdens. We have failed to respond to the mandate that is at the heart of Maundy Thursday - namely, the commandment of Christ to *love one another* (John 13:34).

There's nothing plush about this kind of love. It's not a ride in a luxury sedan with stereo sound and soft leather seats. This is the down-and-dirty love that Jesus showed when he grabbed a towel, hit the floor and washed the disciples' feet.

Truckin' love. This is a key commandment in the New Testament concerning our behavior as a church. It involves carrying stuff, working hard and getting ourselves dirty in the process. A comfy little four-door coupe of a church simply won't get the job done.

Unfortunately, we often miss this divine directive - both inside and outside the community of faith. Church Insiders are like the enthusiastic car buyers of the 1960s: folks who want their own set of wheels so they can scoot around town in their own private and personal relationship with Jesus. They fall into the trap of *neglecting to meet together* (v. 25) and fail to encourage one another in the community of faith.

Church Outsiders don't do much better. They see the church as a cumbersome contraption and criticize it in the same language used by opponents of early trucks, saying it is expensive, inefficient and unreliable. But sometimes it seems that these critics miss the power and versatility of the church. They ignore what the community of faith can do and do so much better than any other collection of people.

It is in the worship of the church that we find forgiveness, being reminded on every trip that Christ has hauled away our sins. It is in the fellowship of the church that we find encouragement, as we *provoke one another to love and good deeds* (v. 24). It is in the mission of the church that we help others in love, reaching out to meet their physical, emotional, relational, mental and spiritual needs. That's heavy hauling. And there's no better vehicle for it than the church.

"To have a faith without any good works is no faith at all," says Patrick Morley in his best-selling book "The Man in the Mirror." Faith alone is just a pleasure ride - far from the truckin' experience of Christian faith combined with good works. God didn't give us salvation for our benefit alone. God has a job description for every one of us, which includes the challenge of good works. The areas in which God wants our service are evangelism, disciple-making and caring for the poor and needy. "This is God's agenda," insists Morley. "We try to make it more complicated, but these are the three tasks God wants us to help him with." Evangelism, disciple-making and caring for the poor and needy. These are big jobs, jobs that only a community can do. Jobs that require a truckin' church.

Evangelism. Go back to the Mack truck of 1910. Remember that the new Mack truck was great for hauling telephone poles using augers to drill the holes for the poles, and winches to string the wire between the poles. These trucks went out on the nation's highways and dug holes. That's the truckin' dimension of evangelism: preparing the ground for something needed and new.

Disciple-making. The poles were set in the ground with a built-in crane. That's the second function of a church that's on a mission: helping others to learn about Christ and follow him. Setting and grounding disciples in a *new and living way* (v. 20).

Caring for the poor and needy. The 1910-era Mack truck also had a power winch that would string wires from pole to pole, connecting the community and enabling the entire system to perform its mission. Christians, like telephone poles, need to be tied tightly together before they can do the job they've been created to do.

Of course, both trucks and churches can do more than this. What's also true is that too often, they can do a whole lot less. Think about it. Trucks used to be all about hard work, getting' the job done. You had your red 1952 Chevy with vinyl seats, 4-speed stick shift and an AM radio. No power steering. No power brakes. That was a truck!

Nowadays you got a \$50,000 pickup, a cowboy Cadillac that's fully automated with power steering, brakes, windows and what-not. It's air-conditioned with a CD player and a DVD player, and you sit in heated, leather seats. You put a protector in the back so the flatbed won't get scratched. And, of course, there are a cup holders for your latte and a pouch for your cell phone. Trucks used to be all about blood, sweat and tears. Now it's about show and tell.

This is a fate that we in the church must avoid. We need to remember our purpose and mission. The church is a workhorse, not a quarter horse; a truck, not a car with pretensions of truck-ness. If that's not true of us, then on this Maundy Thursday, we've got sins to confess and commandments to obey.

Creator and Loving God, you kneel to wash our feet, yet we are reluctant for you to see all the places we have gone in our attempts to escape you. You would bathe us in the warm, living waters of your love, and though we splash and play in the puddles of temptation. We have received all the gifts you have to offer, yet we are tempted to think they are only for us, rather than sharing them. Forgive us, Holy One, and have mercy on us. What can we give you for all your wonderful graciousness towards us? As you have broken your heart for us, may we open ours in service to others. As you have given your life for us, may we offer ours to bring healing to the world. As you have called us together around your Table, may we go forth to feed a world hungry, not only for food, but for that Spirit which brings peace and reconciliation. This we pray as servants of Jesus Christ, who came to serve us in life, in death, in resurrection hope. Amen.

Sources:

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Truckin' the Church

Maundy Thursday, April 2, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Hebrews 10:16-25

A generation ago Americans craved cars, and we weren't so passionate about pickups. Back in the 1960s, Detroit sold a whopping 8.5 million cars for every 1 million light trucks. But check your rearview mirror today, and you can see a change. Annual sales of light trucks in 2014 topped 16.5 million, surpassing cars for the first time in history (16.3 million in 2014). Curious, given the fact that a century ago people had a hard time figuring out what the point of a truck was.

In 1898, the Winton Motor Carriage Company produced the first American truck, a gas-powered delivery wagon. But 12 years later, there were only 11,000 trucks on the road, compared to 450,000 cars.

How come? One reason was that business people couldn't see the advantage. A truck was often more expensive to operate than a horse-drawn wagon. Several dairies in New York City found that trucks were inferior for home milk delivery because the ordinary milk horse was a well-trained and intelligent animal, able to move unattended from door to door while the driver was delivering the bottles. Could a truck do this? No way.

Another reason was that businesses already had a vast network of investments in horse-drawn transportation. They owned not only horses, but stables, wagons, tack and other gear. Businesses didn't want to chuck that investment for something unproved, and expensive.

In 1910, however, the Mack Truck Company figured out that trucks were great for hauling telephone poles, using augers to drill the holes for the poles and winches to string the wire between the poles - and the trucking revolution was on!

It's now been a couple thousand years since the church came into being. And unfortunately, you don't have to go very far to find people who will argue that the church hasn't been much good - in fact, they'll say it's done more harm than good. Like early critics of gasoline-powered delivery wagons, they'll point out that the church is expensive...and inefficient...and noisy...and subject to breakdowns.