**FAVORITE HYMNS**

***Blest Be The Tie That Binds***

John Fawcett (1739-1817) was a young preacher in Wainsgate, England which seemed then to be the middle of nowhere. The Yorkshire countryside in Northern England was barren and cold. The people — goodhearted, hardworking, mostly illiterate — had next to nothing. They supplemented their young preacher’s meager monetary support with wool and potatoes. Nor was there a parsonage, which is a house often provided by the church for the preacher. Instead, Fawcett, his wife and four children were passed from one family to the next, a few months here, a few months there, no place to call their own. They suffered chilly drafts and ate porridge with their host families.

Poverty was nothing new to Fawcett. Orphaned at 12, he became a servant at 13 in order to survive. He worked 14 hours a day and taught himself to read at night. When he was 15, he stood in an outdoor crowd of 20,000 to hear a sermon by George Whitefield, the most famous preacher of that day who had started the evangelical movement with John and Charles Wesley (the brothers who founded the Methodist Church). From that experience he set his mind on becoming a preacher like Whitefield.

One day in 1772, after seven years of laboring as a preacher at Wainsgate, 33-year-old John Fawcett received a call that could change his life and fortunes. He had established a reputation as an inspiring preacher and serious scholar. He was now wanted in a big church in London. Think of it, *London*! The big time. It doesn’t get any better than that. It seemed a dream come true, to move to the most sophisticated and educated city in the world. His family’s standard of living would vastly improve. The city had good schools, libraries, great music and art, churches with stained glass, and educated colleagues for deep conversation. Fawcett agonized over the tempting offer and finally said YES! The family packed up, climbed into a wagon, and waved to the people who had come many miles to say their tearful goodbyes.

However, the scene became so gut-wrenching as he saw those poor people weeping at their leaving that Fawcett realized he couldn’t do this. He turned the horses around and yelled out, “Unpack everything, we’re staying!” He did indeed, staying in Yorkshire for another 45 years to the day of his death.

From this experience he wrote the most famous of his 160 hymns, *Blest Be the Tie that Binds*. It became a favorite hymn for Christians facing separation, the death of loved ones, and even moments when a wayward sinner repents and comes back to the Lord. It speaks of friendships that are far deeper and meaningful than even blood kin. It also shows us that the true measure of wealth is in relationships in Christ, not our bank accounts and other pleasures of life.

Read the lyrics to this hymn and softly sing to yourself, to God, and to all the brethren you have come to know and love over the years. I hope you will also think of me, as I now think of you.

**“Blest be the tie that binds, our hearts in Christian love;**

**The fellowship of kindred minds, is like to that above.**

**Before our Father’s throne, we pour our ardent prayers;**

**Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.**

**We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear;**

**And often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.**

**When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain;**

**But we shall still be joined in heart and hope to meet again.**

Here at Northwest we also have a sweet fellowship that binds us as family. I have not been here 52 years, but I have been here 35. I feel the same toward you as John Fawcett did for that small church in England. I think of you like the apostle Paul felt toward that special church in Philippi. And I say to you what he said to them,

​1 Therefore, ***my beloved and longed-for brethren***, ***my joy and crown***, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. … 15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed ***I have all and abound***. ***I am full***, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.”

Brethren, we indeed share a fellowship of kindred minds like that above (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Our fears, hopes, aims, comforts and cares are one. Over these years we have shared our mutual woes and burdens, weeping with those who weep with sympathizing tears.

No earthly relationships last forever, for I can now think of literally hundreds of saints who have passed through these doors since I first arrived in 1986 who are no longer with us, either by moving, physical death, or spiritual apostasy. But, one promise of God is certain, and to which John Fawcett penned, to those who remain faithful to the Lord, “we shall still be joined in heart and hope to meet again.”

Brethren, have I told you lately, “I love you.”

Blest be the tie that binds. – Rick