

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer
November 26, 2006
www.stjohnsbaptistchurch.org

“But Have Not Love . . .”
I Corinthians 13: 1-8a; 13

It stands even now as a testimony to what could have been. While preaching and lecturing at Chowan University, in Murfreesboro, N.C., I found that when I wasn't speaking I was either eating or touring old houses and museums as the good people of that community tried to instill in me as much eastern North Carolina culture as they could. In a nondescript-looking barn, there it was, a sight that widened my eyes -- the replica of a plane, built 25 years before the Wright brothers flew at Kitty Hawk. It was ingeniously constructed, the body and cockpit built out of a light wood, the wings made of interwoven reed and equipped with a blower that you worked with your feet, like a pump organ, pushing air under the wings. It had a rudder, pulleys and a steering mechanism. The whole thing was built by a man named Henry Gatling.

Naturally, I asked the obvious question: Could it fly? Oh yes, my host answered. With Mr. Gatling at the controls, the plane was pushed off a high barn and glided some one hundred yards before it hit a tree, breaking Mr. Gatling's leg. Here the story turns tragic. Henry Gatling was a brilliant inventor, an engineering genius, courageous, prescient, visionary. But he was also an irascible creature who couldn't get along with others. When a neighbor dropped by to check on him, Mr. Gatling demanded to be taken into town, and when the neighbor refused, Mr. Gatling insulted the neighbor in an incendiary fashion, apparently, for the neighbor went home, retrieved his gun, and killed Henry Gatling. A man of genius, creativity, courage, a man blessed with a host of material gifts -- but Henry Gatling lacked the spiritual gift of geniality. So the Wright brothers are a household name, and Henry Gatling is a minor historical footnote. Ironically, his brother, Richard Gatling, went on to fame and fortune as the inventor of . . . the Gatling gun.

Thanksgiving reminds us that God offers us spiritual gifts. On this Thanksgiving weekend, we do well to take stock of the gifts with which we have been blessed, but we should recognize that God also gives us common spiritual gifts, common gifts that, in the final analysis, are not so common. Certainly, the ability to love others is not so common as we would expect. Just as Thanksgiving calls us to celebrate our family ties, the Lord's Supper calls us to celebrate the bonds of our spiritual family. Indeed, the very word “companion” comes from the Latin: “com” = with; “pan” = bread. Our “companions” are those with whom we eat bread. The Lord's table is comprised of a group of people who break bread together, bread symbolic of our Lord's broken body. We are companions in Christ, as we gather around this table, opening God's gift of love together.

Paul observed: “If I speak in the tongues of men and angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have faith so as to remove mountains, if I give away all that I have, but have not love, I gain nothing. If I deliver my body to be burned, and have not love, I gain nothing. Love is not jealous or boastful, love is not arrogant or rude, love does not insist on its own way, love does not rejoice in wrong, but rejoices in right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never ends.”

As we enter into the season of Advent, we are reminded that God gives us all the common spiritual gifts of faith, hope and love, and calls us to unwrap them. The Supper reminds us that God is constantly giving us gifts and incessantly calling us to companionship. As we break bread around this table we are companions in Christ. God has given to each of us special and unique talents, but the three common gifts are always there for us to claim afresh. *Faith, hope, love.* We are always called to unwrap these common gifts. So let us claim afresh this

morning that when we break bread together around this table, symbolic of our Lord's broken body, we symbolize our companionship with Christ -- but we also symbolize our spiritual kinship and friendship with each other.

Dr. Wm. Richard Kremer, November 26, 2006