

The Power of Peace, Love & Fellowship

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Do any of you remember when the phrase “Can’t we all just get along” was popular? Do you remember who said it back in 1992? Well truth be told, these questions aren’t really fair because Rodney King didn’t actually say those exact words. Instead in that nationally televised interview he said “People, I just want to say, you know, can we all get along? Can we get along?” but most of us prefer to remember the somewhat famous quote as “Can’t we all just get along?”

Now King cried out for all to get along after he became the unwanted face of the 90’s race riots in Los Angeles. King was a taxi driver who gained international fame after being beaten by police officers following a high-speed chase in the early part of 1991. Then about a year later, in the middle of the 6 day race riots tearing LA apart, King was interviewed and during that interview he made this plea for everyone to get along. Although King’s plea happened some 25 years ago, in many ways the same plea happened before him and most definitely after. I suspect most of us would agree that it continues today. And with the rise of social media, and the ease that platform provides for negative communication, a plea for us to get along is a plea needing to be heard.

I wonder though what people mean when they say it. Do they want everyone to just agree all the time? Or, do they want to silence the ones who may not agree with them in order to appear that everyone is getting along? Certainly, we can agree that just appearing to get along, or silencing the voices of those with different ideas for the purpose of just getting along is never really productive. Nor does it lay the foundation needed for the building of strong relationships. Getting along at the expense of your own voice is never really getting along in the first place.

Some believe conflict is in our very nature, and while I’m not so sure about that, I do find it really easy to see conflict all around, all the time. In fact, I would say my legal career has made it pretty easy to see conflict every day. For me, our legal system is structured in a way that conflict ALWAYS happens. Now I’ve heard people try to justify this by saying that our system is adversarial, and while that may be the case, people who hold different opinions do not have to be seen only as our adversaries or our enemies whom we seek to destroy. Nevertheless, getting along with others operating within such a system is next to impossible.

Sadly, people in conflict is not limited to our legal system because make no mistake, conflict within the church is just as prevalent. And you want to know something, conflict within the church is not a new phenomenon and the Apostle Paul's letters to the church at Corinth demonstrates that.

Now before we get into the actual passage for today it is important to know that Paul wrote to his churches for numerous purposes like:

Defend his gospel message against other competing messages; and
Promote harmony in congregations where class, ethnicity, and gender issues created conflicts¹

Now when we turn our attention to Corinth and to its First Church, what we find is a community torn by separation into groups. In fact, the Corinthians' divisiveness has been front and center since Paul's first letter. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul says "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose." Then in our scripture today where Paul is closing out his letters he expresses the same wish: "mend your ways," "agree with one another," and "live in peace" (13:11).

But lets take a step back because we need to make sure we understand that for Paul, agreeing with one another or, thinking the same way is not to be read as an appeal to uniformity. Paul doesn't want them to just get along for the sake of getting along. In his first letter he makes sure he tells them how much he loves and celebrates the diversity of their congregation (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

His request is altogether different... he wants them to have the same mind as Christ when he voluntarily humbled himself and died for the sake of the world. He wants them to have that kind of love for one another because he knows that kind of love will facilitate living at peace and will bring together those separate groups that have only torn the congregation apart.

That kind of love, however, is not possible without the power of God's Holy Spirit. Paul urges the Corinthians to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit working in them -- particularly joy and peace. In verse 11, what the NRSV translates as "farewell" is more literally "rejoice" and Paul knows that joy is a marker of God's kingdom.

¹ Carter, Warren & Levine, Amy-Jill, *The New Testament Methods and Meanings*

Now greeting one another with a holy kiss is a tangible way to show love and fellowship, especially in a community like this who continue to struggle to love one another and who still are learning how to be the body of Christ. But those who are seized by this love, who have the grace of Jesus in their bloodstreams, are joined together in a family which the world has never seen before... a family not based on physical or ethnic descent or relation... a family where anyone and everyone is welcome. It is a family called to share a common life, and the word Paul uses here, *koinonia*, (can be translated 'partnership', 'association', 'sharing', 'communion', as well as the familiar 'fellowship') has been under enormous strain as Paul and the Corinthians have struggled to work out their relationship through visits, letters, reports, rumors, despair and hope. It is because Paul believes passionately that God's own spirit is at work in both his life and that of the Corinthians that he cannot let them go.

Likewise, Paul's desire for peace is also a marker of God's Kingdom and the Spirit's work. For him, the mind that is set on the Spirit is a mind that knows peace and living peaceably should be a sign of the church. God calls the saints to peace and God is a God of peace.

In short, the presence of joy and peace are the indicators of the Spirit's transformative work to reveal God's kingdom... a kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy. In closing his letter this way Paul is not calling on them to just simply get along, he is urging them to be the new creation that the Spirit is equipping them to be.

The final remarks include one last reminder of the theological bedrock that makes the church's existence possible: the Trinity, and even though the Trinity is a doctrine that did not exist during Paul's day, he is very much aware of all three when he says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

The mention of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit in one breath, however, should not be surprising to any reader of Paul's letters. He has already claimed them all in various parts of these two letters. This final appeal for the presence of Christ's grace, God's love, and the Spirit's fellowship bears witness to the divine power that has created and sustained both the Corinthian church and the church today. God is the very source of our life in Christ Jesus, and in Christ we are a new creation.

Taken together the 2 letters we have from Paul to the Corinthians are a roller coaster ride of controversies, raw emotions, and quite frankly a whole lot of irrelevant junk that goes on inside a Christian congregation.

But then comes the end of this exhausting correspondence in which Paul offers this blessing upon them. At this point he's been through the wringer a few dozen times and has surely shed his share of pastor's tears over the Corinthians themselves. Yet in this benediction he blesses them by saying "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

And what more is there to say really? When we take our rightful place inside the Trinity, and live into its fullness we come to find everything we need to exist as believers. This benediction was calling them to break down walls and to build bridges with gifts of grace, love and fellowship. This benediction is calling us to do the same.

The Trinity means an end to conflict and isolation and separation. We are invited to reflect on how God's grace, love and fellowship interplay in our own lives, and the way we choose to live them inside and outside our Church walls.²

We need grace and we need to extend grace to others. Just as Paul returned to this gift of grace again and again in trying to straighten out all of the conflicts in Corinth, we need to be reminded too. We need to be reminded of that gift of grace so that we will keep forgiving and re-forgiving all the ways we manage to wound each other. We need Jesus to be gracious with us and we need to extend that same grace to one another.

We need the love of God, and we need to embrace it. God's love is always present and always available for each of us no matter what. God loves because God must love. God loves because Love is God's very essence and there is nothing any of us could ever do to stop God from loving us and we need to be reminded of that.

And there is one more thing we need... Koinonia. It is that abiding fellowship of the Holy Spirit who took up residence in our hearts after Pentecost. We need that community and God needs it too. If the Trinity only shows us one thing, it should be that God loves community and God wants community for everyone. No one is

² NT For Everyone Commentary

to be alone. Isolation is not who we were created to be and isolation is not an aspect of God. Thankfully with the Holy Spirit we have the glue that can hold us together no matter what. Sometimes the Holy Spirit may be the only thing holding people together, and that's OK.

When it is all said and done, we need to be reminded of this Trinitarian blessing of grace, love and fellowship. We need to be reminded that grace, love and fellowship are for all people no matter what problems those people have created or are creating. We need to be reminded because only through this Trinitarian blessing of love, grace and fellowship can we find that crazy peace that passes all understanding. We need to be reminded that these gifts rain down on God's people no matter what.

KISER MIDDLE SCHOOL 8TH GRADE PROMOTION

Student named Chris who was hit by a car and has been in the hospital ever since. Kiser community came together through cash donations and Go Fund Me to provide Chris' mom some financial help.

Citizenship Award named in Chris' Honor.
Recipient overcome with emotion
Received a standing ovation.

That part of the promotion ceremony was very emotional, as it should have been. In addition to the emotional aspect I saw something else... I saw grace, love and fellowship on full display. In that moment, I saw the fullness of this Trinitarian blessing being poured out in 8th grade middle school children. And you want to know something, it made me want it even more for us.

Grace, Love and Fellowship need to be our focus always. They have been promised to us and poured out on us. This is the path to peace and joy and it is the path we must take.

Amen!