



September 25, 2016

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**Life Together
2 Corinthians 13:11-14
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As you know, we had an open forum last Wednesday to address rumors surrounding Larry's death, to answer questions, and to give you our next steps as a congregation (and by the way, if you were not able to attend the forum, our newsletter, the October Valley Voice, has some articles on our next steps)

What I learned at this forum is that many of us disagree with each other about what has happened in our church the last 3-4 months. The thing is we never will agree. Therefore, the question becomes "How do we live together when we will never agree?" The answer comes from a rather strange place: the Trinity.

The Trinity is a doctrine of Christianity that says there is one God, but three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now, I am not going to try and fully explain the Trinity today. I don't think our human brains are able to fully comprehend the Trinity on this side of heaven. And I know some of you do not believe in the Trinity, and I am not going to try to convince you. But we all can learn something from the doctrine of the Trinity. And this is it: How do we live together when we disagree with each other?

With that, turn to our scripture passage in your bulletin. Before we read, let us pray: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Once there was an elderly man, and one evening he was taking his usual walk. He was enjoying the crisp night air and the wind blowing gently. But suddenly he heard a voice crying out, 'Help me! Help me!' The man looked around and saw no one and so he continued his walk. Again he heard a tiny voice, 'Help me, help me!' This time he looked down and he saw a small frog. He gently lifted up the frog and looked at it intently. The frog spoke, 'I am really a very beautiful princess. If you will kiss me, I will turn back into a princess and I will hug you and kiss you and love you forever.' The man thought for a moment, placed the frog in his top pocket, and continued walking. The little frog looked up out of the pocket and asked, 'Why don't you kiss me?' The man looked down and said, 'Frankly, at this stage of my life, I'd rather have a talking frog.'

This is kind of a silly way to ease into our topic and to say we all exist in relationship to each other. The elderly man did not need a beautiful princess; he just wanted someone to talk to.

Relationships. One of the most beautiful thing we enter into, but one of the most difficult thing to maintain. What I want to say to you today is that maintaining relationships is important because relationships are based on the Trinity: One God, three persons.

I said I wasn't going to fully try and explain the Trinity, but here is a little try. How are the Father, the Son and the Spirit one God? Think of dancers in a circle dance. They move so rapidly and are so intertwined that you can't tell where one stops and the other begins.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit mutually indwell one another. Remember what Jesus said, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:11). The Father actually indwells Jesus' identity and Jesus indwells the Father's identity. Their identities are intertwined.

They define themselves in relation to one another. Without the Son, God would not be a father. Without the Father, Jesus would not be a son. Without them both, the Spirit would not be their spirit. The Father, Son and Spirit are God. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one " (John 10:30). "The Father, Son, and Spirit are not three individuals who come together to hang out; they are the one God. They are bound up in, with, and for one another." (*The Pursuing God* by Joshua Ryan Butler)

Is your head spinning? That is ok, here is what I want you to remember: God is inherently relational.

The Father, Son, and Spirit exist in a perfect relationship. They share affection, intimacy, joy, and love. To express that love, God created us. God didn't create us because God needed us (God already had a perfect relationship). God did not make us out of obligation, but out of desire to express God's love. God created us because God wanted us to experience that divine love.

I believe this is what is meant by being made in the image of God – we are relational because God is relational within the Trinity. We are made in the image and likeness of a God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We exist in relationship because God does. God is social and therefore, we are social. God is love, and therefore we are created for loving relationships.

So, I hope you can see how important relationships are (which by the way, is why we worship together...because we are made for communion not only with God but with each other).

In our passage today, the Apostle Paul is writing to the Corinthian church. They are having problems. They are having a hard time getting along with one another. Paul writes in the previous chapter (12:20) "For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be...I fear that there may be quarreling, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder."

So, Paul appeals to the Trinity – the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We have the responsibility to manifest God’s grace, love and fellowship with each other. Our life together is to be shaped by God’s character expressed through the Trinity.

Paul gives practical ways to do this. It is in verse 11 of our passage. Paul states how to have life together when we disagree with each other: “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.” This “be of one mind” does not mean we all think alike or all agree on everything...it is about remembering who we are...that we are a Body of Christ; that we are in relationship because God is in relationship. Therefore, Paul says, work it out.

Here is another reason why it is worth working it out...the next statement in verse 11 “And the God of love and peace will be with you.” When people give attention to their relationships, when they work toward restoration, when they encourage one another, when they live in peace despite their differences, then the presence of God is experienced in that community.

So, my brothers and sisters in Christ, the forum showed us that we as a body in Christ still struggle with anger and disappointment and hurt with one another. Work it out...because God exists in relationship, and we were created for relationships. And because Jesus said, “Love one another as I have love you.” We have these words hanging on our walls above the welcome centers at the two main entrances. Look at it as you leave today, and ask God, “Who do I need to love again? With whom must I restore a relationship? Who do I need to forgive?” I am preaching to me, too, my brothers and sisters.

Note that Paul goes on and says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” He is saying this to a community of folks who are still struggling to love one another. It reminds me of the advice a counselor gives a couple who claim they have fallen out of love with each other. The counselor gives them a homework assignment. The counselor tells them to start acting as if they are in love with one another in the hopes that the love will come back. If you act on it, the feelings will follow.

Paul is saying even though you struggle with each other still greet each other with a holy kiss (I suppose this is similar to our Passing the Peace...in fact let's do it now. We haven't passed the Peace of Christ for quite a while. Turn to someone you did not come with or walk over to them, take their hand, look into their eyes and say, "The Peace of Christ be with you." And the person who receives it says, "And also with you.")

So as we struggle with one another, let's continue greeting each other with a holy kiss. As we act on it, the love will follow.

It is Paul's prayer that his readers experience divine grace, love and fellowship to the full. We cannot fully understand the Trinity but we can certainly experience it with each other.

I end with a true story told by another preacher (Dr. James Lemler):

The pastor preached one Sunday morning. After the worship service a family had gone home, and during Sunday lunch were talking about his sermon (which warms the heart of every pastor!).)

In the midst of their conversation, the second-grade daughter sitting at the table chimed in. "Oh, Pastor's sermons, they're always the same. You know...blah, blah, blah...love." Well the pastor was amused when he heard the story, and thought to himself, "Hey, this little girl really got it...the message, the repetition, the core, the redundancy."

And so it is with the Holy Trinity...the message, the repetition, the core, the redundancy. Over and over again..."Blah, blah, blah, love..."

God the Creator...I love you and give you life.

God the Redeemer...I loved you enough to come be with you and show you that love. I hold you forever in it.

God the Spirit...I love you and warm your heart and your soul with my love. It is through me that you experience this love.

"Blah, blah, blah love...God the Father says I welcome you to that love. God the Son says I hold you forever and ever in that love. God the Spirit says I enfold you in that love."

And for our part...we are called to believe it. We are called to proclaim it. We are called to invite people into it. We are called to embrace it and be embraced by it. We are called to practice it with each other.

Blah, blah, blah...love.... In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.