

Pastor's Message
August 9, 2020

Hi Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Hope you are all doing well!!

This week we continue reflecting on Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Throughout this sermon series, let us listen to the words of Paul letter, as if this letter was written to our group of friends, to our group of colleagues or to our group of sisters and brothers in Christ to see what advice Paul has to offer for us in these challenging times.

Hope to see you tomorrow.

God's Peace!

Pastor Denise

2 Corinthians 1: 15 – 2:10

A reading from the 1st and 2nd chapters of 2nd Corinthians.

15-16 Confident of your welcome, I had originally planned two great visits with you—coming by on my way to Macedonia province, and then again on my return trip. Then we could have had a bon-voyage party as you sent me off to Judea. That was the plan.

17-19 Are you now going to accuse me of being flip with my promises because it didn't work out? Do you think I talk out of both sides of my mouth—a glib *yes* one moment, a glib *no* the next? Well, you're wrong. I try to be as true to my word as God is to his. Our word to you wasn't a careless yes canceled by an indifferent no. How could it be? When Silas and Timothy and I proclaimed the Son of God among you, did you pick up on any yes-and-no, on-again, off-again waffling? Wasn't it a clean, strong Yes?

20-22 Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus. In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God's Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident. God affirms us, making us a sure thing in Christ, putting his Yes within us. By his Spirit he has stamped us with his eternal pledge—a sure beginning of what he is destined to complete.

23 Now, are you ready for the real reason I didn't visit you in Corinth? As God is my witness, the only reason I didn't come was to spare you pain. I was being *considerate* of you, not indifferent, not manipulative.

24 We're not in charge of how you live out the faith, looking over your shoulders, suspiciously critical. We're partners, working alongside you, joyfully expectant. I know that you stand by your own faith, not by ours.

2 1-2 That's why I decided not to make another visit that could only be painful to both of us. If by merely showing up I would put you in an embarrassingly painful position, how would you then be free to cheer and refresh me?

3-4 That was my reason for writing a letter instead of coming—so I wouldn't have to spend a miserable time disappointing the very friends I had looked forward to cheering me up. I was convinced at the time I wrote it that what was best for me was also best for you. As it turned out, there was pain enough just in writing that letter, more tears than ink on the parchment. But I didn't write it to cause pain; I wrote it so you would know how much I care—oh, more than care—*love* you!

5-8 Now, regarding the one who started all this—the person in question who caused all this pain—I want you to know that I am not the one injured in this as much as, with a few exceptions, all of you. So I don't want to come down too hard. What the majority of you agreed to as punishment is punishment enough. Now is the time to forgive this man and help him back on his feet. If all you do is pour on the guilt, you could very well drown him in it. My counsel now is to pour on the love.

9-11 The focus of my letter wasn't on punishing the offender but on getting you to take responsibility for the health of the church. So if you forgive him, I forgive him. Don't think I'm carrying around a list of personal grudges. The fact is that I'm joining in with *your* forgiveness, as Christ is with us, guiding us. After all, we don't want to unwittingly give Satan an opening for yet

more mischief—we're not oblivious to his sly
ways!

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN

Sticks and Stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me. That old adage that we heard on the playground and probably spouted off more than a few times ourselves when someone was saying something mean about us or to us

However, we have all found out later in life that this old adage is so not true. Not the sticks and stones part, because that can surely break our bones and do us physical harm, but the part about words will never hurt me. We all know and have experienced probably as both the offender and the offended that words can hurt. Words can sting, words can cut and words can hurt deeply and create wounds that often fester for a long long time.

Words spoken in anger, words spoken in frustration, words spoken out of jealousy or envy, words spoken when we don't truly understand the situation, words spoken out of desperation, and even words spoken out of love can sting, cut and create wounds that will never heal on their own.

As we read on with Paul's letter to the Corinthians this morning, it is obvious that there are quite a few details missing that would have helped us see a clearer picture of what had happened between Paul and the church in Corinth that has caused this rift.

There are references in this letter to other communications that perhaps would have filled in the details, but for whatever reason these other letters have been lost or destroyed. And after

reflecting on Paul's message this week, I think it is probably a good thing that we don't know the details of the conflict and misunderstanding, because I believe it would have distracted us from Paul's focus on forgiveness and reconciliation.

In one of those earlier letters that we do not have access to, Paul had rebuked the actions of the Corinthians for not protecting the health and welfare of the community. Apparently his words stung and wounded many of those who heard them, even though from his perspective, he considered his words to be words of advice spoken out of love to warn the church what could happen if people are not held accountable for behaviors that put relationships at risk and are therefore destructive to the community.

Considering the current status of their relationship, Paul has decided not to make another visit, but to write this letter instead. He states in the letter that he did not want his presence to make them uncomfortable and perhaps promote additional hard feelings and create an even deeper division.

What appears to have happened was that one member of the church in Corinth had in some way mistreated Paul on his last visit. And the other members of the church just looked the other way and were unwilling to address the issue.

Paul then wrote a letter strongly recommending that the leadership take action and hold this person accountable for his actions.

In response to Paul's letter, the leadership took extraordinary disciplinary actions against this person, reprimanding him for his behavior and excluding him from participation in the community. Which from this letter we are currently reading, was not exactly what Paul had in mind.

So, now Paul is again writing to the Corinthians asking them to forgive this man, as Paul has already done, and to allow him to return to the community. Suggesting that not only is it time for forgiveness, but it is also time to begin the healing process. As Paul writes: Now is the time to forgive this man and help him back on his feet. If all you do is pour on the guilt, you could very well drown him in it. My counsel now is to pour on the love.

Paul's advice to the Corinthians reminds us forgiveness is only the first step toward reconciliation and restoration of relationships. Forgiveness does not let someone off the hook for their offense, but, forgiveness means that the door has been unlocked and maybe even opened a crack so that the hard work of rebuilding the relationship and restoring trust can begin.

Forgiveness offers a path toward healing, both for the offender and the offended. This faith community in Corinth was hurting from this incident. And to go forward to do the work that God had called them to do, they needed to take that first step toward restoration by forgiving this man.

Jesus taught us to pray – Lord, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us.

And Peter asked Jesus, “Master, how many times do I forgive my brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?”

And Jesus replied, “Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.

Which says to me a few things: first of all, being in relationship with one another (whether it is a personal relationship or it is a communal relationship) has its challenges. Because, we are bound to get ourselves into situations (whether intentional or not) where either words that come out of our mouths or our actions that speak volumes – offend. So, one might say – it is not if we will offend one another at some point in time, but rather when.

The second thing I hear in these words of Jesus is that: as followers of Christ, we are called to open that door or write that letter or make that phone call to make that connection to offer that olive branch of peace - to forgive those who have trespassed against us – just as Paul is doing in his letter to the Corinthians.

For forgiving those who have sinned against us is as essential to the health and welfare to the body of Christ, as healthy eating and exercise is essential to the health and welfare to our physical bodies.

We hear Paul emphasis the need for forgiveness as he writes: the focus of my letter wasn't on punishing the offender but on getting you to take responsibility for the health of the church. So if you forgive him, I forgive him. Don't think I'm carrying around a list of personal grudges. The fact is that I'm joining in with *your* forgiveness, as Christ is with us, guiding us.

And when forgiveness is withheld, Paul suggests that we unwittingly give Satan an opening for yet more mischief.

In this letter, Paul reached out to the Corinthians in love to encourage them to begin the healing process which will hopefully lead to reconciliation and restoration of their community.

This week as you reflect on Paul's advice to the Corinthians and as you pray in Jesus name – Lord, forgive us our sins as we

forgive those who have sinned against us. Take some time to reflect on those who have indeed sinned against you and pray for God's Holy Spirit to empower you, to inspire you and to embolden you to begin or continue (as may be the case) the hard and humble work of forgiveness and reconciliation.

AMEN

Blessing

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, † Jesus, the Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
bless you and keep you in eternal love.

Amen.