



**THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
JANUARY 26, 2020
“HELLO, SMILE, MY NAME IS...”
I CORINTHIANS 1: 10-18**

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

SERMON

In working with couples in therapy, I quickly discovered that there are many ways to be married and many ways to form a family.

We just never marry someone whose family is like ours, right?

In my first congregation, a newly married couple came to me because the husband was upset. His wife did not heat the maple syrup like his mother did when she prepared his pancakes. And, having married a strong woman, the last thing she was going to do was heat his syrup. He was lucky he didn’t get pancakes in his lap....

We gather together under the name of CLC, Christ Lutheran church. But there’s a lot of diversity under that banner. Some are lifelong members, some join as young couples or families. Some join as individuals. We have lifelong Lutherans, former Roman Catholics, former Assembly of God, former non-denominational folks, and some with little church background.

So how do we live together?

What are the ground rules?

Robert frost wrote “**good fences make good neighbors.**” That is, we all need good boundaries to live well together: “here’s what we do and here is what we don’t do.”

And what an incredible thing we attempt to do! A congregation is the only place in the world where we openly say we’re messed up—we confess our sin—where we openly say we don’t quite know why we do all the stupid, mean, hurtful, unconscious things we do to other people, including those we purport to love. And where, in some way, we pledge we’re going to try to come together in community and bypass all the downsides and dangers that usually cause friction and worse.

We must all be a little crazy.

In our reading from first Corinthians we discover that one the first congregations that formed after Jesus encountered conflict. What a surprise!

The congregation at Corinth split into factions according to their loyalty to their favorite pastoral leader. We could easily update it in this way:

“We still love Pastor George and don’t want anything to change.”

“I still follow pastor tom.”

“No, i follow father timothy from my former parish.”

“I joined the congregation since pastor Scott got here.”

And “i don’t know what the heck is going on.”

We’re only human, so it’s easy to see how such loyalties arise, but Paul is clear: the purpose of any pastoral leader is to lead us to Christ. He is our first loyalty. And whenever that loyalty is secondary, we’re going to have trouble. What unites us is our primary commitment to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. We are baptized into Christ not pastor George. We are made alive in Christ, not pastor tom. We shall arise from the dead in Christ, not pastor Scott.

But until that time of resurrection, how do we live together?

We begin with the fact that the Lutheran church is a liturgical church. And the word *liturgy* means “**work of the people.**”

This is why we sing as a congregation. Not just hymns, but the Gloria, the Sanctus, and so on. We pray together. We stand and sit, and yes, that can feel like work after a night of drinking or when the back is starting to feel creaky.

But i want to take “work of the people” a step further.

When we come to worship or to any program or meeting, we come focused to work. And our work is to be us aware, to be alert, to be present to the moment in front of us.

On Sunday morning, we walk up the steps with one another in mind. We are here. Not up in our heads about last night or what we’re going to do this afternoon or worried about all that is scheduled for the coming week.

Be here now. In some way, Saturday night/Sunday morning is practice for our entire week. Eighty percent of success is just showing up. But showing up is not just being physically present, although that is necessary. Showing up is being aware of who and what is in front of us and, on Sunday morning, **that is most often one another.**

I want to suggest that the work we are here to do is all **relational work**. First, in renewing our side of the connection with god through the liturgy, the hymns, the scripture, the sermon, and the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion.

But, second, relational work with one another. It is best to put a boundary around our work on Sunday morning. Don’t discuss church business during this time together. There is plenty of time for that another time. We use this time to connect with one another. Relational work time.

In this regard. A new goal emerged from council/staff/admin team retreat: we work to create a safe, caring faith community. We withhold judgment, greet one another in friendship, build harmonious relationships, speak the truth in love, and warmly welcome those new to us.

The first words of Jesus’ first teaching are “the kingdom of god is falling upon you—is in your midst—is within you.” The Greek is ambiguous.

But the kingdom—the emerging reign of god—is now slowly taking root on earth.

And here among us, here are the ways we work to stay in touch with the spirit of that kingdom....

Being able to say hello and goodbye is basic to human connection.

In countless ways, we are given the opportunity to say hello and goodbye.

It’s much harder than we might think.

A study released years ago concluded clergy are terrible at saying goodbye when they leave their congregation. The study was entitled “running through the thistles.”

The author recalled his days growing up in Canada. Between his home and the school was a huge field of thistles. He and his brother could either walk around this thistle field on the way

to and from school or run through the thistles, enduring the pain of being cut again and again during the shortcut.

Walking to school was one thing, but getting back home? They often chose to run through the thistles.

The study revealed that pastors generally do a horrible job of saying goodbye. They race out of a congregation, as if through a thistle field, rather than the slower and harder work of taking the long path of goodbye and farewell.

But what about hello?

The overarching psychological and spiritual organizing principle is that **“there is no me without thee.”** It takes another person to help us maintain a healthy sense of well-being. Without greeting one another with hello, we communicate that this other person is invisible. And many of us feel like we don’t matter, like we are invisible to the world, anyway. Can this be the one place in our lives where we experience that we matter?

Looking one another in the eyes and greeting one another with hello is a gift.

As is a smile.

The basic psychological need from birth to death is called mirroring. You see me. And if you see me and smile, then i know i am pleasing to you. And when your eyes smile, there is congruence on your face.

And then we can shake hands, give an appropriate hug, high five, low five, slap on the back, but dang-gone-it, i am glad to see you.

No one should leave Sunday morning feeling invisible....

Right after declaring the presence of the kingdom of god, Jesus calls his first friends together. His posse, his team, his inner circle.

And he doesn’t say “hey you!” Or “come here, monkey breath.”

He calls them by name: Simon, peter, Andrew, James, john.

Part of our relational work on Sunday morning is calling one another by name.

Last Sunday during the sharing of the peace, i asked max to tell me his name once again. He had told me before, but i don’t remember as quickly as i used to.

There is no shame in asking someone’s name a first time, a second time, or a third time.

In fact, we all should cut one another a break. It’s not all that easy to know everyone on Sunday morning, but we can work to learn.

Especially the newest people who have joined the congregation and our visitors on Sunday morning.

Let's make this a habit, our routine, a characteristic of who we are as a congregation.

Hello, a smile, and introducing ourselves to those we don't know by name.

It's okay to ask again and again if we forget. That shows we're interested and we care....

The sharing of the peace is more than hello.

If we go back to the divisions among the people of the Corinth congregation, the sharing of the peace is meant to be a way that we re-connect with anyone with whom we've had difficulty.

We are offering one another the peace of our risen lord.

It is not a good experience when someone offers me their hand and the words "the peace of Christ" when their eyes are killing me with daggers or they do not look me in the face. There is a disconnect.

If possible, we get up during the sharing of the peace, move around, offer peace, a hug. I often also use it as a time also to introduce myself to someone i don't know. This is a kind of sacred relational time. A time to connect. A time that says we're good with one another. A time to say i wish the best for you—the peace of Christ...

As your pastor, i declare that on this weekend, January 25 and 26, **we are done with drama.**

There's no reason for it. If you want to create a disturbance, take it somewhere else.

Everyone is doing the best he or she can. Me, the staff, the council, the admin team, our ministry teams. No one is setting out to mess something up.

Healthy relationships require seven compliments for every criticism, so unless you're reached your compliment quota with someone, you might think about keeping your negative comment to yourself. It does not help. We all experience the world being a tough place. Here, we work to lighten the load for one another.

If you must share a concern or criticism, follow Paul's advice: **speak the truth in love.**

And this means speaking directly to the person involved. Telling deb does not mean it will get back to me. Telling a choir member does not mean it will get to Ed. Good relationships are one-to-one, face-to-face, not some slow lob around the barn....

Outside of worship, 2020 is the year where we will work to provide small group opportunities where we can get to know one another better as we study, pray, or do ministry together.

Toward this end, we are offering three opportunities during lent to gather in smaller groups.

Here they are....

We will focus on getting our ministry teams up and working.

And later, work to create small groups for prayer, study, and support for those who are interested in building connections in smaller settings.

CLC is back on its feet. We largely have worked through the needed transformation. We have survived the fallout. We are thriving in so many ways. Now the good, hard work is consciously building relationships and building a strong community centered in our relationship with Christ.

SERMON SONG

Let's Get Together by the Youngbloods