**June 7, 2020 2 Corinthians 13:11-14**

***Order of Faith***

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 13:11-14 NRSV

*(11)Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. (12)Greet one another with a holy kiss. (13)All the saints greet you. (14)The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.*

**Notes:**

1. Paul’s final word of ***instruction***.
   1. Four things for the church to ***understand*** and do.
   2. “Put things in ***order***, listen to my ***appeal***, ***agree*** with one another, live in ***peace***.”
2. When the people of God heed Paul’s advice; it is a ***glorious*** site to see.
   1. The community of believers have stepped out in ***faith***.
   2. Grace, Love, Communion is the order of ***faith***.
   3. Paul refers to Jesus’s ***grace***, focus on God’s immense ***love***, and ***communion*** with the Holy Spirit.
3. We cannot function as the body of believers, if we ignore what it means to ***partner*** with God in grace, love, and communion.
   1. Life can be difficult, but then somebody lifts you up; offers you friendship; being the ***hands*** and ***feet*** of God.
   2. God has come to you in ***human*** ***flesh*** and you have found grace, love, communion.
   3. The order of faith is ***embodied*** in the people who follow Jesus.
   4. Work toward ***unity***; experiencing the unmerited ***grace*** of Jesus; accepting the steadfast ***love*** of God, and participating in the ***communion*** of the Holy Spirit.

**Transcript:**

I mentioned watching the CBS Sunday Night Movie in last week’s message. I did turn it on this week, but with only minutes left in the movie. It was no disaster for me because I had seen this movie years ago. But you know what gets my goat, when I turn on a movie I have wanted to watch for a while and catch the last concluding moments. And in some ways ruining the movie for me when I watch it from the beginning. I know some people who turn to the back of the book and read the final pages just to see how it ends; then they decide if they will read the rest of the book.

Perhaps you have done that in the past, turned to the ending and decided if you liked it enough to read the whole book. In some books there’s material in the core that influences how you feel about the ending. Other books you can read the final chapter and it is enough to satisfy your interests.

In many ways our passage today is one of those passages. You could read this passage and be satisfied with the ending, but there is much information that could be enlightening and help you better relate to the message. Paul is closing a letter to the Corinthians. And this letter is one in which Paul is disciplining the church. He is telling it what they must do in order to get their lives back on track. And in this closing, he is encouraging them to make the necessary adjustments. Turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 13:11-14 and follow in the reading of our sermon passage for today.

***2 Corinthians 13:11-14 NRSV*** *(11)Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. (12)Greet one another with a holy kiss. (13)All the saints greet you. (14)The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.*

We have skipped over an entire letter to the very closing, the words we read are encouraging and uplifting. But we may not know the reason for such words. We may just read them and say oh! That’s nice. But there is something to be said about reading the verse in the correct context. It certainly doesn’t hurt to know where Paul is coming from and where he is pointing.

“Finally,” Paul says, and this time he really means it. There are others of his writings where he says “finally” several times and like the Energizer Bunny he just keeps on going. He probably did that when he preached, too. “Finally, brethren,” Paul would say and everybody would just roll their eyes. They’d believe it was the final remark only when they saw it. But not here. Here, he really means it. “Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell.” But Paul can’t just say “so long.” He’s got to get in a final word of instruction, even if it is brief. In this case, he doesn’t disappoint. “Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace.” Paul lists four things that he wants the people of the church to understand and do. It’s a tall order no matter how you add it up, isn’t it? It’s tough for any of us to do that. “Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace.” But if you do know the context of the church at Corinth, you know just how utterly impossible Paul’s advice really is. “Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace.”

If you know what’s going on in the church at Corinth, you know that Paul is just spitting in the wind. This group in Corinth is a tough bunch. They are immoral and they are selfish. Groups in the church are trying to get the upper hand on others in the fellowship, they squabble constantly, and they have revealed a complete disregard for one another. We have all heard of churches where there was bickering and backbiting. But this church makes them all look good. the people in Corinth make these others look like perfectly rational people. If there is one thing the cantankerous Corinthian church cannot do, it is to put things in order. They can’t agree with one another either. Definitely not their strong suit. And to live in peace? You can forget about it! And they’re not too good at listening to Paul’s appeal, either. After all, some of them don’t like Paul very much. There are those who much prefer Peter (he has a fire in his belly, let me tell you) or Apollos (boy, can that Apollos preach!). Paul can’t even put two sentences together. His mind is always traveling here or there, and he has other problems as well like that “thorn in the flesh” thing he keeps talking about. Now, here he is, telling the people in the church to listen to his appeal. Fat chance.

So, while some of them might be trying to do what Paul has suggested, especially Chloe’s people, since they’re the ones who came to Ephesus and told Paul about everything that was going on in the church back home. There are plenty others in the church who aren’t going to give Paul the time of day, much less give heed to his appeal. But HEY!!! You can’t please everybody, and Paul knew that; especially when their hearts were not devoted to God. But it didn’t keep him from sharing with these people what they needed to do. Put things in order; Listen to my appeal; Agree with one another; and live in peace.

How hard can that be? One would think that it would be easy. Well it is not easy; not by a long shot. But when the people of God do it, just for a fleeting moment, it is a glorious site to see. Take a look at the past 2-3 months Churches were asked not to meet publicly, yet we were still able to maintain our worship services we were still able to worship the Lord, and we were able to make contact with persons who haven’t set a foot in a church for quite some time. Take a look at the ways that the community has come together to meet the needs of those who were going without. You may be saying well that was not the church, But I dare to differ, how many of those people were a part of a church somewhere. Just because we are not wearing our matching Church shirts, doesn’t mean we are not the church. I am proud of the way that we as the community of believers have stepped out in faith and fed the hungry, gave shelter to the homeless, Extended grace to those who were in need, and had mercy on those who were desperate.

But look at what has happened over the past two weeks. Protests that have turned into violence; perhaps the original protestors were pursuing a peaceful demonstration But others come in who have differing opinions Differing attitudes as to how get things accomplished And before you know it, the private business owners of the community are the victims of looting, vandalism, and desecration People are fighting against the ones called and hired to protect the peace, our police And people are getting hurt, innocent people are being hurt. People are hurt because others cannot put their lives in order People are hurt because we do not listen to Paul’s appeal. An appeal to agree with one another, an appeal to live in peace. Oh, it can happen, but we have to work for it.

And the, “…grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” Did you hear those ingredients? Grace, Love, Communion… Right there is the order of faith, here is the cure for our problem, this is the key to the kingdom of God. Grace, Love, Communion. The other part, where Paul says to put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, and live in peace; That is a practical dimension, That is the social part of being and doing church; But you cannot do the practical parts without Experiencing the unmerited grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Accepting the steadfast love of God And participating in the communion of the Holy Spirit. The order may differ from person to person, but the elements remain the same. And take a quick note; God is not defined as the Father, and God is not listed first. Jesus is not referred to as the son, but he is listed first. Then the Holy Spirit is mentioned. Why do you think Paul chose this order, why did he say it like this? What do you think this means?

Paul’s intent may not be to identify God’s different manifestations. Perhaps he is not thinking of the trinity according to their position and station. Perhaps he is not thinking of them according to their relationship with each other. Maybe, he is thinking about the roll of each in the revealing of God’s purpose. Right now, I imagine blank stairs looking at me as you wonder what I mean? Rather than emphasizing Jesus as God’s son, Paul chooses to refer to Jesus’s grace. And, rather than describe God as father, Paul is focusing on God’s immense love. And the communion associated with the Holy Spirit means fellowship, partnership, sharing, and participation. The word used for communion comes from the word koinonia, have you heard it before? When the bickering people of Corinth recognize the grace extended to them by Christ, the extravagant love shown to them by God, and the fellowship they are offered in the Holy Spirit; They have no choice but to do the things Paul is asking of them put their things in order, listen to Paul’s appeal, agree with one another, and live in peace.

While we do much better here than the Corinthians, we cannot function as the body of believers, as the body of Christ, if we ignore what it means to partner with God in grace, love, and communion. These are the three elements that add up to the order of faith.

Life can be difficult, it can get complicated, and many times life is messy. When life sends obstacles to mess up your plans, you get down in the dumps, lower than low, feeling that everything has been a waste. But then somebody comes along and lifts you up, they share a kind word of encouragement; they help you out with a chore, extending an reassuring hand; they do something to take the burden off of your shoulders and put it on themselves. This is when you experience the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. You feel alone and don’t know where to move next. Someone steps in beside you and offers you friendship. And you know that in that person you experience the love of God displayed. You’re searching for answers and in a conversation with another believer. Then something is said that makes so much sense you cannot help but believe that the words you just heard were the words of God spoken directly to you, meant just for you. you know in your heart you have experienced communion with the Holy Spirit. That friend is being the hands and feet of God whether they know it or not.

God has come to you in human flesh and you have found grace, love, communion. It is the order of faith, and you discovered it not at the mall or at work, not playing board games or shopping. You found it in the church; Not in the building as one may think; But in the body of believers, the body of Christ, the Church.

Sometimes churches act badly, that is true. They shun people because of their disagreements on how things should be. They abandon one body of believers for another because they are angry with somebody. They talk about one another and say mean and critical things about others. They sit back and see what the other person in the pew is going to do, instead of taking the initiative and doing it themselves. But every once in a while, we get it right. the church hits the nail right on the head and gets it right. We act like Jesus would act, we do what Jesus would do, and when that happens, we discover the order of faith, and it is a beautiful, wondrous thing to behold.

The order of faith – grace, love, communion – is embodied in the people who claim to follow Jesus. It may not happen every day, but occasionally, it does happen. And on those occasions, it makes being a part of the church worthwhile, it makes being the church so important, if for no other reason than just to see it for ourselves. When we are really and truly the church, and we get our act together, we live out the order of our faith. It is indeed worth being here just to see it happen and to be a part of it, don’t you think?

So I invite you today, to listen to Paul’s appeal, put your things in order, the affairs of this world but even more importantly, the affairs with eternal implications; find a way that you can agree with one another, develop a dialog, make an effort to view things from the other person’s perspective, maybe even agreeing to disagree without any animosity; and live in peace. Greet each other with love and appreciation; and, *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”* Work toward unity by experiencing the unmerited grace of Jesus, accepting the steadfast love of God, and participating in the communion of the Holy Spirit.