TRINITY SUNDAY

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

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*Holy Community* 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

The very short passage we just heard is from the apostle Paul, its his last words to the church in Corinth. Although the passage is short it is important because it shows us what Paul believed the church needed to do to move forward. Moving forward, having hope and a future, this had been in doubt because there had been a lot of arguing among the Corinthians.

What had happened was that after Paul had been with them, had taught them and nurtured them into a vibrant community of believers, he had left them for missionary work in other places. In his absence, other people had come forward and presented themselves as teachers. Paul refers to them derisively as “super apostles”—and they had begun to teach many things that were opposite, or inconsistent with what Paul had taught them.

Paul’s letters are an attempt to undo the damage this has caused the church. Throughout this letter, Paul has challenged the “super apostles’” teaching and has repeated his own lessons. He has also reasserted himself as their authority and teacher—something that had also come into question.

What all this means is that the Corinthian church has begun to lose its sense of unity. As one group pulled away toward the “super apostles,” and the other argued for Paul as their sole teacher and guide, they had begun to lose their sense of oneness and fellowship—they were losing their sense of community, their sense of being one body—the body of Christ.

That is why Paul’s closing words are so important because unity is not only important for group survival. In the case of this church, and all other churches that will come together as Christ followers, unity points to the character of God who is Son and Savior, and who is also God the Father and Mother, and God the Holy Spirit.

These three are unified, they are unified with one another. Yet, they are also not *uniform*. They are, however, one being even as they are three. Each has a particular role to play in the salvation of humankind. This is what unites them and causes them to live in perfect peace and love. And they are to be our example of how we may live with one another, unified and at peace.

So, when Paul invokes his message of “farewell” to these Christians, it reaches beyond the moment of its reading. Paul’s “farewell” is not only “goodbye,” it also means “may you have a good journey”—and the journey Paul constantly envisions is the one that travels through this life toward that ultimate destination with God, Christ, and Spirit. Paul’s good-bye to the Corinthians, then, is like his spiritual “guidebook” for their own journey through life, even unto death.

The words Paul left ringing in their ears offered the Corinthians a prescription for holy living. Indeed, it was a way to not only live together, what Paul gave them was a way to live together in holy peacefulness, and his instructions were quite specific.

First, he tells them to “Put things in order” [v. 11]. This is Paul’s attempt to get the Corinthians to prioritize. That which is important will be separated out from the extraneous, the “junk” that clutters up our lives.

Second, they are to “Listen to my appeal” [v.11]. The most important word there is to *listen*. They cannot hear if we will not be quiet and tune in. Listening saves us from the risk of going off half-cocked, misinformed and misdirected. People must listen for the message of God’s love—which comes to us through the work of the Holy Spirit.

He tells them that they should “Agree with one another” [v.11]. Paul means that they are not just to tolerate each other’s company (some of the Corinthians apparently could not do even that). They are called to celebrate one another.

Since God’s love extends to each of us, there is reason to celebrate every individual. Instead of criticizing shortcomings and highlighting the negatives of each other, they are to try emphasizing the positives. Just because they have differences doesn’t mean they cannot “agree to disagree *in love*.”

We are also to “live in peace.” [v.11] When differences are celebrated instead of castigated, we can experience harmony instead of discord, shalom instead of shouting.

We are to “receive the gift of love” [v.11]. Most children, the ones who are living in loving homes, are better at receiving love than adults are. Children receive love graciously and unself-consciously.

For adults, it is more difficult to relax in comfort and confidence in the offer of God’s love after we have spent the day keeping our vulnerabilities tightly locked away from view. We can accept that God is love, but it is far more difficult to accept that God’s love for *us*, that the joy and bliss of the Holy Spirit is ours, too.

Paul also invoked the presence of “all the saints” in his farewell to the Corinthians. Likewise, even all these centuries later, we, too, are a part of all the saints, the entire community of faith—and not just *this* community of faith—Nu’uanu Congregational Church. Paul was also referring to all people who have received Christ and have lived their lives guided and strengthened by his grace, by God’s love, and by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

It is in feeling the strength of all that support that we can live together in the same kind of peace and mutuality of the God who is Three-in-One, a Holy Community.

On this particular Sunday morning, the first Sunday after Pentecost, we acknowledge all three parts of God’s character and what this can mean to our lives as individuals.

Even as God is One, God is more than one. As Father/Mother, Son, and Holy Spirit, we acknowledge that God is social in nature. This is to say that God and presents God’s self as a collective wherein each part has plays a role in our salvation. Each one loves us in their own way. It is this common goal, to love, that dissolves the boundaries between them and makes them Three-in-One. Their one purpose is to love, to create, to nurture, and to strengthen.

This is whose image we are made in. This is what our lives are meant to reflect. Together, we are meant to reflect the same mutual support and love of the Holy Community who is God. We are meant to look to the Holy Community for inspiration; to see how love unites them and gives them focus and strength. We are also to notice how each one celebrates and supports the others—just as we celebrate them this morning.

One of the writers I read likened Paul’s words and the Holy Community’s work to be like a traffic circle—those things that are placed in intersections and are meant to slow down traffic and make it safer. The writer puts it this way:

*“Perhaps Paul’s benediction could be reworded with our roundabout journey in mind. It might sound something like this: Farewell, brothers and sisters. Remember that we are all traveling in the same direction, although at differing speeds. At times, a fellow traveler may need to exit (the conversation, the project, life itself) before you do. Trust each other enough to allow that freedom. Keep your eyes on the road and wish people well in their travels.*

*Don’t be so focused on your destination that you forget to enjoy the scenery along the way. As we continue in our* roundabout journeys*, let’s endeavor to agree on the general direction we’re traveling. We can work through our differences. At times, we may bump into one another, but because we’re all traveling together, we can handle the collisions easily. Acknowledge and be aware of the differences that exist, but celebrate the larger agreements we share.*

In other words: let us allow ourselves to be glad of the God who comes to us as a Community of Blessing, thus showing how we may also be blessed as we move forward. Let us rest in the loving work of this Holy Community and let us endeavor to reflect its peace and love. May this be so. Amen.