

SERMON**SECOND
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

460 East Main Street

Lexington, Kentucky 40507

Care for One Another (Part 1)

October 7, 2018

John 15:12-17

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The 2019 Stewardship Campaign will begin next week. You'll be receiving a letter, narrative budget and pledge information. The theme of this year's campaign is Caring for One Another. Caring for one another is part of the Second Presbyterian Church's mission statement that appears on the front of the bulletin each and every week and occasionally we use the mission statement as part of our Affirmation of Faith during worship services.

Today is the first of three sermons that include the phrase "one another." I am taking some liberty here in how we care for one another by three ways that we do so. Did you know that the phrase, "one another" appears in Scripture in 542 verses? Today we look at "love one another" followed by "live in harmony with one another," (October 14) and finally we will end with "bear with one another" (November 11 Commitment Sunday).

Jesus said, "These things I command you, that you love one another."

Stop the first 100 people you meet on the street and ask them this question, "What is wrong with the church today?" You will get plenty of answers!

It's so easy to criticize what others are doing. If you look diligently enough you can find something wrong with everything. A farmer's neighbor was so negative, criticizing everything and anything. The farmer bought a new plow, the neighbor said it would rust soon. The farmer remarked how it was good to have more rain this year, and the neighbor lamented that his crops would rot with all this rain. It went on ad nauseam.

The farmer determined he would find something to cheer up this bottomless pit of despair. He went out and purchased the finest hunting dog and secretly trained him to fetch by walking on the water, instead of swimming.

When hunting season came the farmer invited his sour neighbor to go with him. When the first flock of ducks passed by, the farmer and his friend shot several ducks each. The farmer yelled to the dog, "Fetch!" The hound darted, his feet barely skimming the surface of the lake. He scooped up four ducks from the water and was back in an instant, dry as a bone. "How 'bout that?" questioned the farmer. "Can't swim, can he?" replied the sourpuss neighbor.

We ought to judge the church at its best, not its worst. The church's best are the ideals and principles upon which it was founded by Jesus.

If we are honest we can see that most in church are 98% wonderful. The other 2% manage to mess things up. The problem is that unbelievers, and even critics within, focus on the 2%, and not the productive 98%. It's wrong to judge all ministers by the few who fall into gross sin. It's wrong to judge all elders by the few who do nothing, or just cause trouble. It's wrong to lump all members in with the hypocritical few who aren't faithful in their relationship with God. But I think many people use this as an excuse not to become involved in the church. Don't let someone else's unfaithfulness keep you from getting involved or from deepening your relationship with God. It's never too late!

Jesus addressed the disciples with the command to love one another. To love means to seek another's highest good. It is to want what is best for another even at the expense of what you might desire personally. Our goal is to find ways to lift each other in the church, not put one another down. That puts us at a fork in the road. You can criticize, or you can build up, but you cannot do both. Love . . . as Christ also loved . . .

Jesus loved the church (us); and he saw much potential for good in each of us. Jesus called us branches of his own vine. Each of us who are members of the church, the body of Christ, is a limb. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. Jesus expects to see fruit produced. He wants us to be great limbs, bearing wonderful fruit.

Verse 12, that you love one another is a direct restatement of verses 1-11 on what it means for disciples to live out Jesus' love.

Jesus tells the disciples, *"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love"* (John 15:5-9).

Anyone who has ever dealt with vines knows that the branches all run together, they are so intertwined that you can't tell where one stops and another begins. This illustrates that there are no free-standing individuals in the faith community.

As any gardener will attest, a crop must be cultivated. It doesn't just happen.

Churches are like that. We are a collection of branches and the Lord can certainly grow us, but there is also some cultivating that needs to be done. Given the right circumstances, attitude and care, the church can be grown and built up like a vineyard. In contrast, given the right circumstances, the church can also wither and die—we must nurture and cultivate if we are to bear fruit.

How do we love one another? How do we care for one another?

Paul, when writing to the Ephesians refers to several kinds of love. One is sacrificial love. *"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"*(Eph 5:1-2).

Jesus sees that kind of potential in you and me. He sees this kind of potential in the disciples and the text specifically says that Jesus chose them—not the other way around. Jesus was speaking from his heart. We, as the church, are the embodiment of the heart of Jesus Christ. That heart is filled with all kinds of good things.

In the heart of Jesus was the willingness to be a sacrifice for the whole world. Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate demonstration of his love. In the church you will always find members who are ready to give.

One of the things that gives me joy is the generosity of God's people. It is a common sight to see a Christian put another's need before his/her own.

Another kind of love that Scripture refers is purifying love. *“That [Jesus] in order to make [the church] holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind-- yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish”* (Eph. 5:26-27).

Among the many reasons Jesus gave himself for the church is that the church might be cleansed of things that harm and drag us down. The guiding principle is uplift! Jesus lifts us out of the anger and selfishness of the world.

Just think of the blind man who Jesus healed. With the hand of love the man received his sight, and his life was never the same again. Jesus cast out demons; he forgave a woman who should have been stoned to death. He even met a murderous young Pharisee named Saul and turned him into the world's greatest evangelist.

Jesus is still touching lives, even you and me, with his love. He does it through the church, the body of Christ, filling us with the Spirit of hope and forgiveness.

There is also caring love. *“For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body”* (Eph. 5:29-30).

Paul is emphasizing the spiritual nourishment of the soul. The church meets physical needs sometimes, but our main diet is the building up of the Spirit with caring. We gather for fellowship, study of God's Word, and prayer. We become aware of each other's needs. We worship together, building up the spirit with praise, we care for one another.

Finally, there is unifying love . . . wholeness.

Wholeness means together as a unit. We are the body of Christ, a unit. We are not all the same and there is great diversity. There are more varieties of believers than opinions in a Church survey. How boring and narrow minded we would be otherwise.

Now in spite of all this diversity, there is one unifying force. The Holy Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of God who teaches us this unifying love. One Spirit, one body, one God and Father of all.

We are not all the same, but we are one in God. We may not all act the same; but in God we can act in love. The church, with this unifying love is much like a baseball team. Nine players with different talents, different assignments, but all with just one purpose—win!

The love God wants for the church is tough, enduring, and sees beyond human emotions and selfishness. It gives, uplifts, cares, builds, and unites. It is the kind of love Jesus had in mind when he said, “love one another as I have loved you.”

The mark of a faithful community is how it loves (how it cares for one another) not who are its members.

We Care for One Another by first loving one another as Christ has loved us.

Sources:

Harper Collins Bible Commentary, James L. Mays, Editor. San Francisco, CA, 2000.

The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 1991.

Gail R. O’Day, The Gospel of John, The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume IX, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 1995.

The message is from sermons that I preached over the years that I have been in the pastorate. I have compiled them from the notes I made before they were preached. I do not know where I found some of the material contained here. I may have borrowed it, as a whole or in part, from others. I simply do not remember. If this is the case, I apologize right now, and that our combined efforts will glorify God.