

2 Corinthians 13:11-14

¹¹Finally, brothers, rejoice. Set things in order. Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³All the saints greet you.

¹⁴The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Farewell

I.

Not many of you have your Evangelical Heritage Version Bible out here with you for an outdoor service. The heading above this final section of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians is titled: "Farewell."

He says: "Finally, brothers, rejoice" (2 Corinthians 13:11, EHV). Again, without your Bible in front of you, you won't see the footnote next to "brothers." The footnote reads: "When context indicates it, the Greek word for brothers may refer to all fellow believers, male and female." Context certainly indicates that Paul was speaking to both men and women as he concluded his letter to this congregation.

"Rejoice," Paul tells this congregation. His correspondence with them hadn't always been very pleasant. There was sin in the congregation—some of it quite open and notorious. He had found it necessary to call them out on their sin—to rebuke them. Visits were made. There was no change. A letter was written, sometimes called the "lost letter," since it is not in our New Testament (mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9). Another letter was written, First Corinthians, where he again reprimanded them for their sin.

People don't really like to be told about sin. Some stay away from church because they don't want to hear about things they might have done wrong. Everything that goes against what God has commanded is sin. Since everyone does things God does not approve of, everyone is a sinner. When churches do what Paul did and condemn sin, sometimes people see the church as a bunch of hypocrites—condemning what each one does him/herself.

It's true. Since every human being sins, Christians who condemn sin are hypocrites, since they sin, too. But Christians know the rest of the story. Paul said it himself, when he wrote to a young pastor named Timothy: "This saying is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,' of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15, EHV).

Christians condemn sin because they want the sinner to know about the forgiveness Jesus won for all.

II.

"Finally, brothers, rejoice. Set things in order. Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace" (2 Corinthians 13:11, EHV). All Paul's efforts to correct the congregation in Corinth had paid off. The congregation had followed his instructions and changed course for the better. Problems resolved are a great reason to rejoice.

"Set things in order" and "be encouraged" are in the passive voice in the Greek. As Paul ends his correspondence on a happier note, he urges them to let his efforts take effect. Things were to be set in order by what Paul had told them, and they were to be encouraged

by that.

Once that had been accomplished there were some things for them to do. Sin is constantly a problem in our society. It's not like it is ever going to go away. Paul urged them to be at peace and agree with one another; sin was not to dominate their relationships with one another.

“And the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11, EHV). Through all the turmoil the congregation had faced, God was still with them. God still granted forgiveness.

III.

It's Trinity Sunday today. It is the *Triune* God who made us and who saved us.

The First Reading today spoke about creation. That work we attribute primarily to God the Father. But in that reading you heard: “The Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters” (Genesis 1:2, EHV). God the Holy Spirit was there at creation, too.

God spoke the “Let there be's” to bring things into existence. The Gospel according to John tells us: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made” (John 1:1-3, EHV). Jesus was there at creation, just as the Father and the Spirit were. That's why the Creation account was the First Reading for Trinity Sunday.

Today's Gospel Reading was Jesus' Great Commission. We are to baptize and teach in the name of the Triune God. It is the Triune who saves us. God the Father created us and planned salvation. God the Son accomplished salvation by his death on the cross. God the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in the Savior's work, so that we might have personally what Jesus did for all people in his death on the cross.

It is the Triune God who blesses us. Paul closes his letter: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14, EHV). That blessing can be found in nearly every one of our services.

Do you understand the Trinity—the Triune God? Neither do I. Our creeds confess the fact that each person of the Triune God is separate and distinct—there are three individual persons. Though there are three separate and distinct persons, there is a unified Triune God—not three gods. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be separated.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” King David called Jesus Lord long before the baby Jesus was born. The name “Jesus” is a form of Joshua, which means: “The Lord Saves.” Jesus is the only name given under heaven by which we might be saved. Jesus accomplished salvation on the cross for us, being the perfect sacrifice God's justice demanded to pay for the sins of the world. The sign of the cross is usually made as the pastor speaks of the Lord Jesus in the benediction. Christ is his title—the Greek term for the Messiah of the Old Testament. Farewell, Paul says, in the name of Jesus.

“And the love of God.” Even as God created the world, he knew human beings would fall into sin. Still, he loved us. He knew there would need to be a plan to rescue fallen mankind. From eternity God the Father made plans for our salvation. God the Father made his plans, knowing that the only thing that would do is the sacrifice of God the Son to rescue us. There was nothing about you and me that deserved this sacrifice, but God loved us so much he was willing to do it. The Apostle John says: “See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1, EHV). Farewell, Paul

says, in the name of God the Father.

“And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit brought us to faith. He *gave* you faith in Jesus as a free gift. Now you are a temple of the Holy Spirit; he lives inside you. As he continues to live there in your heart, the Holy Spirit unites himself with you in fellowship—strengthening your faith. Giving you knowledge and understanding as you grow in your faith in Jesus. Farewell, says Paul, in the name of the Holy Spirit.

All of this Paul summarizes with his blessing that has come to be known as the Apostolic Blessing: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14, EHV). And with that, Paul closes. Farewell.

IV.

Farewells can be bitter-sweet. Taking your baby to kindergarten for the first day of school. There is a new stage in life, and things will change forever. Those firsts continue—high school, college, a wedding, perhaps saying goodbye as your son or daughter goes off to military service.

Today we have a farewell, too. Mrs. Yax is retiring. As Paul had to do with the Corinthians, through the years Jean Yax had to correct students many times—telling them something they had done was wrong—a sin. Yet she had the great joy of announcing the forgiveness won by Jesus for that sin. We give thanks for the many years of blessings God has brought our students through her instruction.

As she leaves her full time called ministry, we echo Paul’s first words in this reading: “Finally, brothers, rejoice. Set things in order. Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11, EHV). God will continue to be with us as Jean retires. He will also be with her.

Mrs. Yax, go with the Apostolic Blessing: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you” in your retirement. And, of course, we also ask that same blessing from the Triune God for each one of us: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.” Amen.