

## 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

<sup>11</sup>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.

<sup>12</sup>Greet one another with a holy kiss. <sup>13</sup>All the saints greet you.

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

### Finally!

#### I.

Finally!

The reading before us this morning is the good-bye section of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. He had spoken of many things with them. There had been problems in the congregation that Paul addressed in both his letters. There had been factions. There had been sexual misconduct.

Sin affects so many things. It had affected the relationship of this Christian group with their founding pastor—Paul. Sin had affected their relationships with each other. Sometimes they had failed to acknowledge sin, or to point out the sins of members of their congregation. At other times, when one of their members had acknowledged some sin, the rest of the body refused to offer forgiveness. By necessity Paul had to chastise the Corinthian Christians—he had to reprimand them.

But all of that was in the review mirror by the time we get to this farewell portion of Paul's letter.

"Finally, brothers, rejoice" (2 Corinthians 13:11, EHV). While our reading in the Evangelical Heritage Version translates "brothers," it clarifies in the footnote that context often indicated both male and female readers. That's the case here, since he was writing to the whole congregation. Paul is recognizing this group as a group of Christians—brothers and sisters in the faith.

"Finally, brothers, rejoice. Set things in order. Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace" (2 Corinthians 13:11, EHV). Now that all the reprimands had been given and the Corinthians had been admonished, it was time. "Set things in order" and "be encouraged" are both in the passive voice in the original language. These Christians were to let Paul's efforts take effect. Things were to be set in order for this congregation, and they were to be encouraged by that.

*Then* they were to actively *do* some things: agree with one another and be at peace. While sin is a constant problem in society and in our own lives, sin is not to dominate our relationships with one another.

"And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11, EHV). With God's help and with his blessing, God's promises still applied to these Christians.

#### II.

Finally, dear brothers and sisters in the faith, rejoice. Finally!

It has been such a long time, hasn't it? 13 weeks, to be exact. The last time many of you were at a worship service at Holy Trinity was March 8, 2020. So far it has been an unusual year—a year like no one can ever remember.

I'm pretty sure I could find some general sins to bring to your attention after 13 long weeks away from worship together. Did you have some harsh thoughts toward those in authority and the decisions they made? Perhaps you had anger about a disease or just over the circumstances that made it necessary to be cooped up. Though the Lord tells us not to be anxious about anything, you might have been filled with anxiety over the twists and turns of your personal finances and the hoops you had to jump through to make things work these past weeks. Resentment over any number of situations has likely plagued you.

Finally! My "finally" isn't coming to you after several chapters of reprimands. I won't enumerate your sins or my own during these past 13 weeks. What I *will* say is: Finally, dear brothers and sisters in the faith, rejoice.

#### III.

"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).

Paul’s greeting has become such a custom within the Christian Church in the centuries since he wrote this that it just rolls off the tongue without much thought, either by the speaker, or by the one listening to the sentence.

This Trinitarian greeting embodies everything we celebrated in the Easter season and always.

Start with “the love of God,” even though God the Father is listed second in Paul’s greeting. Agape is the word used for love here. Agape love is love that loves even when love isn’t deserved. The First Lesson today spoke about the Father’s love in creation. He designed and built a whole universe for the crown of his creation—human beings. He designed us in his own image—perfect and holy, as he is.

Mankind lost all that with the fall into sin, yet God the Father’s undeserved love did not stop. His love continued as he planned salvation for us. Never did his undeserved love for us waver; in the fullness of time he sent the Savior we didn’t deserve to fulfill his undeserved love for us.

Next we consider the “grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Grace is not an obligation, but a gift. God the Father, in his undeserved love, promised a Savior. Though it was the Father’s plan, Jesus was not *obligated* to bring salvation to mankind. Paul says to the Ephesians: “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9, EHV).

Holy Week and Easter summarize all Jesus did for us. He took every bit of our sins—our indiscretions, our outright lies, our subversiveness, our distrust, and anything else you can think of, to the cross. He paid the full price of all of it, then gave up his life. He rose again to assure us that grace is complete—that salvation belongs to each of us individually.

Finally Paul wishes for us “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit who brings us into fellowship with Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who works faith in our hearts—faith that believes in Jesus and the grace he has given us because of the Father’s undeserved love. It is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that brings us together as a Christian community to have and express this fellowship with one another.

Doesn’t the word “fellowship” hit closer to home than ever before? For weeks we have been denied the fellowship of our entire congregation. While the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that brought us to faith in Jesus never left us, we have been longing to *express* that fellowship with one another for some time. Here we are. Finally.

#### IV.

The writer to the Hebrews says: “Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have the habit of doing” (Hebrews 10:25, EHV). It isn’t because of neglect that you haven’t been here. You have been worshiping all along; differently than usual, perhaps, but worshiping none-the-less. Via livestream and by your own personal devotions and Bible study.

Finally we can come together. “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (2 Corinthians 13:12, EHV). Corinthian culture was apparently related to French culture—a little kiss was a customary greeting. I guess I won’t recommend that, as we are still being advised to social-distance, but doesn’t it feel great to sit out here on the Holy Trinity back lawn and see the faces of your fellow worshipers, rather than just a screen with one pastor in there somewhere? I can definitely say to you it is great to see so many of you in person today.

“All the saints greet you” (2 Corinthians 13:13, EHV). The fellowship of the Holy Spirit extends beyond our own congregation. 13 weeks of not being able to worship together with one another makes us itch for fellowship. One blessing, however, might be to begin to have some realization of all the saints who are like-minded. I bring to you today greetings from people around the country who have sent in messages because they were worshiping with you on the livestream throughout these past weeks. It is a reminder to us *all* the time that this group of Christian believers who gathers as Holy Trinity Lutheran Church is not just some isolated group, but part of a larger body of believers. They send their greetings. We send ours back to them, as well.

Finally! Rejoice.

Actually, never *stop* rejoicing. When you realize that we have the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with us, we have it all. Rejoice. Amen.