

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

January 15, 2023

One Another

“Live Harmoniously with One Another”

Romans 15:1-6

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In a sermon that Stewart Ruch was preaching, he pointed out the truth that in family life and church life, there's always a huge gap between the *ideal* and the *real*. He says, for example, every autumn his family likes to go apple picking. Ruch then writes, “Here's the *ideal* day of apple picking. The leaves are golden and rusty, the sky is beautiful, and it's 75 degrees. We all pile into the van and start singing and laughing as we merrily drive to the orchard. We arrive early in the morning with plenty of time to enjoy the orchard. Surprisingly, the folks at the apple orchard say, ‘Today apples are free for families.’ So, our kids guzzle apple cider and stuff themselves with apple donuts—and they don't even get a sugar high! Finally, after a perfect day at the orchard, we drive home as our children keep saying, ‘Wow, thanks, Mom and Dad!’ But the *real* day often looks like this. It's a disaster from the start. We leave at least 2 hours late. The apple orchard closes at 5 PM, we're leaving at 3 PM, and it takes an hour-and-half to get there, but I bark at everyone, ‘We're going, so get in the car!’ We missed lunch because we were scrambling to get everything done. With blood sugar levels plummeting, my wife and I start arguing. I think it's her fault that we're leaving late; she says it's my fault. We keep arguing until the kids interrupt because now they're arguing with each other. I turn around and snap at the kids, ‘Knock it off! I'm arguing with your mom.’ When we pull into the apple orchard, we only have 30 minutes before closing time. So we tell the kids, ‘Hurry up, so you can have some fun.’ By this time of the day all the good apples are gone, and nothing is free. The entrance fee was outrageous because they know they can rip off suburban families who are trying to pretend they're in the country for the day. When we get the kids back in the van, it's already dark. On the way home, we finally get our apples: we stop at McDonald's for an apple turnover. Unfortunately, family life and church life aren't always ideal. That's why we have to practice love, acceptance, and forgiveness in the midst of real community among real fellow-sinners.”

Last week, I preached we are to be accepting and welcoming to everyone, all fellow sinners. The challenge, once we all become a part of a local church community, is how to get along especially with each other. The reality is healthy relationships require intentional, diligent, hard work to make them work. As I heard David DeSilva say in a video that is a companion to his book, “One Another”, “*To live above with saints we love; oh that will be glory. But to live below with saints we know; well that's a different story.*” So, how do we get along with the saints here below? Especially turn to one passage to look at what the Bible says about us living harmoniously with one another.

Romans 15:1-6

15 We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves. ² We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. ³ For even Christ didn't live to please himself. As the Scriptures say, "The insults of those who insult you, O God, have fallen on me." ⁴ Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.

⁵ May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. ⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the church in Rome, one of the challenges they were facing that Paul talks about is the relationship between those Paul calls the stronger and weaker members. The stronger Christians as Paul identifies himself as being, understood they were no longer under obligation to keep the Mosaic dietary laws, nor did they need to strictly adhere to Sabbath laws because they had been fulfilled in Christ. They knew they were free to drink wine and eat food, even if they had been used in pagan temple sacrifices, as long as they did not drink or eat to excess. On the other hand, the weaker Christians' consciences were bothered by eating certain foods, not keeping Sabbath laws, not observing Jewish feast days, and eating or drinking pagan food and wine Paul appeals to the stronger Christians to get along with the weaker Christians by being considerate of them by not flaunting their freedom to do these things in front of those who might be offended or bothered by their freedom even though they are not doing anything wrong.

CONSIDERATE OF ONE ANOTHER

In order to get along with each other it is absolute necessary for us to be **CONSIDERATE OF ONE ANOTHER (vv. 1,3)**. It is impossible to considerate of one another if we are selfish, need to be in control, have to have things our way, if we have an inflated ego, or full of pride. To be considerate of others, we need to humble ourselves, set aside our ego and pride, the need to have things our own way, and instead be selfless, care about the needs of others as being as important or even more important than our own needs, take the time to listen to the other person's opinions, and even strive to understand them before we are understood. Being considerate is getting into the skin of the other person, walking in their shoes to truly understand them.

How do you train a 20-something medical school student to feel genuine empathy for senior citizens? The answer is "The Age Man Suit" that the students will wear as it has been custom-made to simulate the physical consequences of old age. The suit consists of ear-protectors that stifle hearing, a yellow visor that blurs eyesight and makes it hard

to distinguish colors, knee and elbow pads which stiffen the joints, a Kevlar-jacket-style vest which presses uncomfortably against the chest, and padded gloves, the Age Man Suit weighs around 10kg. Dr. Rahel Eckhardt from Berlin, Germany, helps strap the suit onto the med students as she tells them, "Welcome to old age. My aim is to turn young energetic people into slow, creaking beings, temporarily at least. That way they will, I hope, develop a feeling for what it's like to be old." Eckardt argues there is a huge disconnect between large sections of the medical profession and their elderly patients, as well as a desperate lack of doctors willing to go into geriatric medicine. Eckardt says, "Rather than a PowerPoint presentation, this is the best way of giving them a real idea of what it's like to be old, and only once we have their empathy can we really begin to win students round to becoming interested in old people as patients." *Of course this doesn't just apply to how we treat the elderly. Stepping into someone's "body suit" or trying to empathize with their life and situations, helps us deal with conflict, friendships, and marriages, relationships in the church, in every relationship we have.*

Isn't this exactly what Jesus did for us? Listen to how the Bible describes what it looks like to be considerate of others and then shows us how Jesus was considerate to us. *Philippians 2:3-8* says, "³ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. ⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. ⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross." Even though Jesus was God He came into this world and was considerate to us by humbling Himself, living the totally selfless life in serving us, as Jesus became one of us to understand us and reach out to us in all gentleness and love to reconcile things between us and God. Jesus went 100% of the way to walk in our shoes, to live in our skin. We are to follow His example in all our relationships.

BUILD UP AND HELP ONE ANOTHER DO WHAT IS RIGHT

Along with being considerate of one another, *Romans 15:2* tells us to ***BUILD UP AND HELP ONE ANOTHER DO WHAT IS RIGHT (v.2)***. We are in this very challenging journey of life together and God calls on us Christians to come alongside each other and help each other finish well. We desperately need others to build us up and encourage us. *Hebrews 10:24* says, "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works." How can we encourage one another on to acts of love and good works? One way is to ***be careful what we say to one another***, to make sure our words do not tear down but encourage and build up. *James 4:11a* says, "Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters." Also, *James 5:9* says, "Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!" Another way we can help build one another up is to do as *Galatians 6:2* instructs us to, "Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ." There may come a time in our life when we are down and out and need someone to

help us just to take another step in the journey. There will also be people in our lives who need that kind of support from us when they are ready to give up.

While most high school athletes have their family cheering for them on the sidelines, Susan Bergeman's brother, Jeffrey, is there every step of the way during her 3.1-mile cross country races. For every practice and meet, Susan, 14, runs while pushing Jeffrey, 15, in his wheelchair. When he was 22 months old, Jeffrey went into sudden cardiac arrest, which led to severe brain damage and a diagnosis of cerebral palsy. It was important to Susan that she find a way to get her brother involved in an activity at their high school, and cross country made sense. Susan took a cue from her parents, both runners who've included Jeffrey in their race. She said, "He loves running. I think it helps me get even closer to my brother." When it gets hard running with Jeffrey uphill or over uneven terrain, Susan said she will "push away the pain and focus on him enjoying it." She added that "hearing everyone screaming, and cheering gives me a big adrenaline rush." Susan models what it means to be considerate of others by selflessly sacrificing what she could accomplish as a runner in order to help Jeffrey accomplish what he could not do on his own. In so doing she is blessed beyond any medals or accolades. It's interesting that in every race her brother finishes just ahead of her. That's what God wants us to do for each other in our relationships with each other in the family of God.

LIVE IN COMPLETE HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER

Finally, Paul knows we are going to need all the help we can get as he prays that God will enable us to ***LIVE IN COMPLETE HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER (v.5)***: As those who are members of the family of God, God expects us to live in harmony with each other. Paul writes in *Ephesians 4:1-6*, "*Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ⁴ For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. ⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.*" We are to make every effort to live as followers of Jesus by being united through the Holy Spirit. The passage here gives us a key to making this happen and that is to be "*Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.*" (v.2) We all have faults, and we need to expect them and make room for them in people's lives.

Shiro Oguni opened a restaurant in Shizuoka, Japan, in which all the waiting staff have dementia. Shiro says, "Dementia is so widely misunderstood. People believe you can't do anything for yourself, and the condition will often mean complete isolation from society. We want to change society to become more caring and easy-going, so we can live together in harmony." Shiro goes on to say, "We opened a limited period popup restaurant where all the waiting staff are dementia patients ... and what did we call ourselves? The 'Restaurant of Mistaken Orders.'" In a video about this, Shiro shows the wait staff who have dementia lined up at the door of the restaurant bowing to the

customers as they enter the restaurant. Then they take orders and begin bringing the orders to customers seated at the tables. In the video one elderly server has a delicious plate of food which she offers to a guest, who smiling shakes her head that this is not what was ordered. The server says with a big smile, "It isn't? Oops! Sorry dear." Another waiter puts a drink in front of a customer only to take it back. "Oh, sorry, that wasn't right. Oh no it was! I heard what you said, but I just can't remember!" Another waiter needs help in totaling the bill and the customers kindly help them with the math. There is an atmosphere of joy and smiles at every table as the wait staff needs help getting the plates of food to the correct person and words of gentle apology about the confusion. Shiro says, "Our restaurant is stylish, and serves great food. If your order was mistaken, you can shrug it off with a smile and enjoy what comes your way anyway. The name, 'The Restaurant of Mistaken Orders,' allows our customers to enter with an open mind. They expected mistakes, so were OK with it. It created an air of easy-going acceptance. I'm convinced that if our message become more mainstream society will become more tolerant and open." The video ends with a summary: 37% of orders were mistaken. But 99% of customers said they were happy. God wants our church family to be a place where we readily make room for each other's faults and imperfections, even going so far as to forgiving and being forgiving for how shortcomings. Making room for each other's imperfections and freely offering and receiving forgiveness is essential to maintaining harmony, peace, and unity in a community of imperfect people.

Romans 15 tells us that the only way we can live in harmony with each other, make allowance for each other's faults, be considerate of one another, and build up and help each other as we should is by the grace and power of God. Being in complete harmony with each other is a miracle that cannot happen without God's work in our community through the Holy Spirit. As verse 6 says, the result of when we do live in harmony with each other is that we will then with one voice bring glory, praise, and honor to God in this world.

The Holy Spirit is here moving by God's grace to empower us to be in harmony, to knit us together in unity. *"⁵ May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus.*

⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Icebreaker I – Share a family experience of the "ideal" and "real" you've had on vacation.

Icebreaker II – Consider the "Age Man Suit." What do you need to "put on" in order to better empathize with particular people in your life with whom you perhaps struggle with being considerate?

1. If you received a letter from Paul (a missionary) saying he wanted to visit your family or small group, how would you react?
2. In introducing himself to the Christians in Rome, how does Paul describe himself?
3. Is there something you intentionally do not do so as not to be a “stumbling block” for another person?
4. Recall a situation in your experience of Christian community when things escalated to emotionally charged conflict. What would it have looked like for each party to adopt the mind of Christ in the situation?
5. What conversations are going on in the life of your congregation right now that are leading to individuals or groups taking sides? How could you and others work together to change the dynamics of these conversations such that each party hears and values the concerns of the other?
6. Are there impediments in any of your relationships for which you are at fault? For which you think someone else is at fault? Or is it unclear or both at fault?
7. What steps will you take to approach someone with whom you have a problem to begin reconciliation, renewal of harmony, and restoration of the relationship?
8. How is it with your soul?
9. What are your struggles and successes?
10. How might the Holy Spirit and Scriptures be speaking in your life?
11. How can this group pray for you this week?