

# God is with you – 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Pastor Colin Rieke – June 11, 2017

<sup>11</sup> Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in 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 send their greetings. <sup>14</sup> May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

How are you feeling this morning? For many of you this is probably a day you hoped never would come. It's a day that, in some ways, I hoped never would come. My last Sunday as a pastor at Grace-Benson and Grace-Vail. Which means that this is the last sermon I will preach as your pastor, which means that after today, we will have to say goodbye. And I'm not good with goodbyes. Which is one reason we're already trying to make plans to visit the southwest sooner rather than later.

I guess one way that we can cope better with the goodbye is to take comfort in the fact that now, more than ever before it is easier to stay in contact with people who are not physically close with us. The technology advancements of e-mail, Skype and Facebook allow us to know what's going on in people's lives more than thirty years ago. And we will certainly not only think of you when we are in Palos Heights, but we will also let you know about some of the big events in our lives, like when baby #4 is born.

But even with this, a goodbye is hard, even if you couch it in the word "farewell" instead of "goodbye." It's hard because over the last six years we have grown close. We have grown close personally, and we've grown close spiritually. And while it's OK to be sad, while it's OK to even shed a tear or two, there is a great comfort we can have, more than just "we might see each other in the future someday." And it's a comfort that the Apostle Paul wrote about in a letter to the Christians in the Greek city of Corinth. These are words that we have before us this morning. Words that remind us that while I will not always be with you, GOD IS WITH YOU. Not only IS GOD WITH YOU, but GOD WILL ALWAYS BE WITH YOU. Let me read the words from our second lesson once more.

1. By Grace
2. In Love
3. For Fellowship

Now imagine with me for a moment, what it must have been like for Paul, the writer of this letter, and the Christians who were in Corinth. Corinth was a city of a million problems, and the congregation that Paul established in Corinth was no different. Paul had arrived at this Greek city on his second missionary journey and stayed with them for a couple months. And then, only after a couple months he left them. How heartbroken they must have been. Maybe it's not that big of a surprise that these newer

Christians in Corinth had such a weak understanding of the Christian faith. Maybe it's not that big of a surprise that these Christians found themselves being swayed by numerous other teachers.

And yet, despite this, Corinth was a congregation that was still near and dear to Paul's heart. And when he heard about some of the problems that were going on in the congregation, he wrote them a letter. He wrote them the letter that we now call 1 Corinthians. In that letter, we see Paul going item by item, as if he's going down a list, explaining the problem, and then calling for a solution. Then he sends that letter off, with the hope that he will visit them soon.

A few months later, as Paul is making his way towards Corinth he hears back from this congregation, and overall he must have heard a good report. And so he writes another letter, this is the letter of 2 Corinthians. And in this letter (and you can read it if you want) Paul gives his encouragement and his commendation to the Christians living in Corinth. They had addressed many of the issues that Paul had brought up in his first letter, and he was letting them know he was on his way. But before he closes his letter, he gives them one final encouragement. An encouragement to not just rest on their laurels, but to continue striving, continue fighting for the truth, continue loving one another. Because a Christian life is not over once they believed in Christ and amended their ways, but it was only beginning.

But Paul doesn't just say do this for me, or do this because you like me, or do this because I'll find out if you don't. He says do this because of God. Do this because of our God, a God who is beyond our puny understanding. A God who loved you. A God who saved you. A God who walks with you. It is the same God we are reminded of today as we celebrate Trinity Sunday. It is the same God who is with you today, and will be with you for the rest of your life.

While it's easy for us to know this (in our head), sometimes it can be a little bit more difficult to know this (with our hearts) and believe it. It can be very easy when things aren't going the way we want them to go, or things aren't going the way we hoped they would go, we might wonder what's wrong with us or we might even wonder, what's wrong with God? Has God abandoned me? Has God abandoned this congregation? And so, even though you may know GOD IS WITH YOU (in your heads), in your heart it's not so easy to believe. It's not so easy to believe, because your sinful nature makes its living out of convincing you the exact opposite, that God is not with you. And unfortunately, all too many people believe their sinful nature. Unfortunately, all too many Christians at difficult times in their life might be convinced that God is not with them.

Which is why Paul's words to the Corinthians are so important. Which is why going back to the Bible is so important. Which is why attending worship regularly is so important. Because there's nothing the devil would love more than to see this church empty on a Sunday or shrink during the vacancy. Because that means less people are hearing God's Word. Because it is in God's Word that we are reminded, it is there that we are convinced, it is there that we are assured that GOD IS WITH YOU, no matter what is going on in your life. Paul says, **"The God of love and peace will be with you."** He is with you because of what he has already done for you.

If you've been around Grace Lutheran long enough, chances are you've heard these words of Paul, **"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit**

**be with you all.”** These are words that close some of our services. These are words that remind us that our God is an awesome God. These words remind us that our God is a triune God.

**“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...be with you.”** Whenever you’re tempted to think that God doesn’t love you right now, all you need to do is go back to this phrase. **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”** is the reason you’re here today, it’s the reason I’m here today. The grace of Christ is the perfect life he lived in our place, the innocent death he died in our place, and the glorious resurrection guaranteeing our resurrection. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is the proof that God loves you.

For it was only the **“love of God”** that could save you in the first place. In our first lesson from the Bible this morning, we heard about the creation of the world, and what a special place God placed our first parents, Adam and Eve, at in all of creation. This special place in creation shows us his love. But even when Adam and Eve turned away from him, he loved them enough to promise a Savior. And so even when we have turned away from our God, our God does not turn away from us. God’s love is not conditional upon our love. Paul says, **“This is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us.”**

He loved us by not only sending Jesus as our Savior, but he loved us by sending the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and lives. To work in us not only the knowledge of what the Bible says, but to believe what the Bible says. Through the Holy Spirit, we have a unique fellowship or relationship with God. And because of our fellowship with God, we now have a unique relationship with one another too. And how special that is.

Think about it. Think about the people sitting around you today. How many of them would you know or be friends with if it wasn’t for the relationship God has with you? Perhaps you would know some of them, but I think there would be a lot of people you don’t know that are here. That’s what makes the relationship we have with God so special. It’s a relationship with God and with each other that we are able to celebrate in the Lord’s Supper here in a few moments, where we get to realize God’s grace, love and fellowship with us in a unique way.

What makes this relationship so neat, is that even though we are taking separate paths on this journey we call life, we still are all on the same path to heaven, no matter where we are on this planet. GOD IS WITH YOU, and he has showed it time and time again, and I have confidence that he will continue to show it to you in the weeks to come.

There are a lot of things that I don’t understand in this world. I don’t understand all the intricacies of politics. I don’t understand advanced mathematics. I don’t the Trinity of our God. I don’t understand why certain things happen in our world or in our church. But what I do understand and believe with my heart, is that God is with me, and GOD IS WITH YOU. He is with you by Grace. He is with you in Love, and he is with you for fellowship. Amen.