

“May God Be with You”

Friends, we’ve had some problems and some difficulties, haven’t we? You’ve known all along, as have I, that you live in a corrupt place where temptations abound. We’ve talked about many of them at many times, both in person and in writing. And yet, you still need encouragement. You still need hope. Listen one more time: watch out for the dangers that are all around you. Be careful to avoid those who would lead you astray. Cherish your fellow believers, including those who bring God’s Word to you. Be generous with what God has given to you by his blessing. Use it to his glory. And yes, I will do my best to help and encourage. I want to be there for you, even if sometimes life’s situations make it impossible.

The thoughts that I just shared with you are my attempt to briefly summarize for you the message that Paul by inspiration wrote in his second epistle to the Corinthians. Obviously, I didn’t go into great detail on any number of issues that he discussed in that letter. But what strikes me in looking through 2 Corinthians is how similar First Century Corinth was to Twenty-first Century Tucson. And, quite frankly, that could easily be said about so much of Scripture and about so many places in our world today. Sin and temptation have not loosened their grips on society or on us as individuals. That has not changed. But neither has the solution, the peace and love that God offers and gives to us in his Holy Word.

So today we won’t be paging back through all of the specific issues that the Corinthians were dealing with at the time that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, but we will carefully focus our attention on the final words of his letter, his concluding greetings and prayer. And we’ll note that his prayer is ours for each other: “May God be with you.” And we rest in the assurance that God will answer this prayer and that he will be with us to bless us now and forever.

“Finally, brothers,” Paul writes, **“good-by. 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.”** Paul had many ups and downs with the Christians in Corinth. During his second missionary journey, he spent a year and a half in that city, not long after being run out of other cities that he visited. During that time, he no doubt grew close to many of his brothers and sisters in Christ. In the time since, Paul had written two previous letters, one that we don’t have, and the other that we know as 1 Corinthians. And this third letter was more of the same. There were serious and disconcerting issues, but through it all, the Corinthian Christians remained Paul’s dear brothers in Christ. And as he closed his letter, he offered them his warm wishes and more importantly the promises of God.

The God of love and peace would allow the Corinthians to live in the way Paul had been instructing them. They could continue to grow together and care for each other. And in fact, Paul called on them to express their unity and their close relationship by greeting each other with a holy kiss. Times and cultures have changed between Corinth then and Tucson now, but the parallel is still there. Greet each other warmly. Welcome your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul also says, **“All the saints send their greetings.”** There was a wider fellowship of believers, fellow Christians that Paul had met even if the Corinthians had not. That fact was one to be celebrated. The Corinthians were not alone in their struggles or in their joys. In fact, in this letter, Paul had encouraged the Corinthians to participate generously in an offering that would benefit Christians far away. And those and other Christians were already responding with joy and thanks regarding the Corinthians.

And the meat of this section of Scripture for our consideration on Holy Trinity Sunday comes in the final verse, the Trinitarian or Apostolic Blessing. These words may well sound familiar as they have been used in our worship services: **May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.**

And unsurprisingly, this verse separates easily into three unique parts. Paul first offers the Corinthians the blessing of the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is worth our time to look more closely at each of those words. Grace is the undeserved love of God toward sinners. There is nothing in any of us since the time of Adam that is good enough or that does enough to earn or merit God's love, but God loves us. In spite of the temptations into which we daily fall and even the depths to which we sometimes sink, God gives us his grace.

And specifically his grace is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ. The title Lord reminds us that he is true God, ruler over all. He has power and might and deserves our worship and praise. His earthly given name, Jesus, means Savior or "the Lord saves." Jesus was born a true human being to suffer and to die in place of sinners like you and like me. He came to save us. He went to the cross to accomplish that goal, and he rose victorious from the dead. And he is the Christ, the one chosen from eternity to carry out that gracious rescue plan. No wonder that Paul blesses the Corinthians and by extension all of us with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!

He also sets before us the love of God. Clearly the context tells us that this reference is to God the Father specifically. God has shown us his love by creating us and the world around us, and he richly and daily provides for us all that we need.

Finally, Paul also offers the blessing of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Fellowship speaks about a sharing or having something in common. We use that word around church from time to time to talk about activities that we do together, like meals or games. But the word really is about the relationship, not about those activities. The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to faith brings us into a relationship with God. And that relationship that we have with God is also expressed in our relationship with fellow Christians.

Of course, something you might notice is that we can't always keep these three concepts separate. They overlap and interrelate. The fellowship relationship that we have with God is based on the forgiveness of sins that Jesus won for us on the cross, which was prompted by God's love. That is how God works and operates. It was the same way in our first lesson about how God created the world. We normally speak about that as the work of God the Father, but God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were also actively involved. Try as we might, we can't really divide God according to the things that he does, because God is one. And at the same time, we confess that God is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

That's why our sermon text is an appropriate one for Holy Trinity Sunday. In it we clearly see references to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But we also see that one God, the God of love and peace, is discussed. We see that Paul refers to each of the three persons of the Trinity, but he does so in a way that they are intimately connected and can't easily be discussed separately.

The concept of the Trinity is in one way so simple that even a child can understand it. There is one God. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the same time, none of us can fully understand it. And this makes sense, too. God is so much different than us, so far beyond us, why should we expect to understand him? But he loves us, and he shows himself to us. He saved us from our sins and he promises us eternal life. And the way he has revealed himself to us is one God in three persons and three persons in one God. In just a short while we'll spend some time confessing precisely what the Bible says about God.

For now, we'll close this sermon the way that Paul closed his letter to the Corinthians. God richly poured out his love on us even though we deserved none of it. He has revealed himself to us in a way that we can barely even appreciate, much less understand. But he promises to bless us. May God be with us all. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The Text: 2 Corinthians 13:11–14 (NIV84)

¹¹ 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.

¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints send their greetings.

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