

Sermon Title: "Brotherly Love"

May 2nd, 2021 – 4th Sunday in Easter

Text: 1 John 21

Theme:

What's in it for me?

Sermon Text:

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you drive around town, there are several different kinds of Churches and you may wonder what's the difference? Besides the usual "Baptist," "Catholic," "Orthodox," "Presbyterian," and "Methodist," Churches, there are many different sub-flavors. There are four different sub-denominations of Lutheran Churches in Lacey alone, "LCMS," "ELCA," "LCMC," and "WELS." While we can highlight many differences in worship styles and doctrinal disagreements between the Lutherans and the Baptists, we tend to spend a significant amount of time, particularly on the convention floor, impugning the faith of others. We have even seen congregations in our own church body attack other congregations for their temporary Covid-19 worship practices. Is this really how Jesus wants us to be using our time, treasure, and talents, or does Holy Scripture give us a different path to follow?

In our epistle text today, the Apostle John tackles these issues head-on. Inter-church and inter-congregational conflict are nothing new in the Christian Church. John and his brother would argue with the other Disciples over who was the greatest among them. They scattered and fled with Jesus was arrested and executed, but after Jesus rose, they came together as a cohesive group, well most of the time. (Paul did call Peter out for being a little two-faced when it came to ministering to the Gentiles when there was a Jewish audience looking on.) By the time that John had relocated to Ephesus, Turkey with Jesus' mother, Mary, he had grown into a mature Apostle of the faith and was the only one to die a natural death, albeit he did survive poisoning and the penal island of Patmos. "Love" is a major theme of John's ministry and is clearly reflected in his three epistles as well as his Gospel account and Revelation.

So, as I have mentioned before, we have struggled with this idea of brotherly love in the Church. Just like siblings we have fought over just about everything from what colors we should display to when we should celebrate Easter to whom should we admit to the Lord's Supper. We have spent a



tremendous amount of energy fighting like brothers, bitter and brutal, but is that kind of brotherly love that Jesus asks of us?

Our epistle text starts out telling us that we need to be able to discern whether the Holy Spirit is talking to us or a spirit serving the devil. John warns us of false prophets. Mohammed, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith, and David Koresh were all false prophets. All of them denied either Jesus' divinity or His humanity, or at least corrupted it.

The big emphasis of the passage is loving our neighbor as Christ first loved us. John tells us that we cannot truly know God and follow God if we do not also love our neighbor. We must do both. If we do not love our neighbor, we cheapen God's grace, and as John puts it, "make Him [God] a liar."

So, in these two passages, we kind of have the bookends of how our relationships should be in the Church. We want to be sure that we are listening to the Holy Spirit and have pure doctrine, but when we compromise our relationships with others because they make other choices regarding doctrine, and worship styles, what good is it? If we sacrifice pure doctrine to maintain worldly relationships, how much are we really listening to Jesus, or do we have the world's earbuds in our ears?

As a general rule, the LCMS spends a lot of time, treasure, and talent studying Scripture and trying to make sure that we are following Scripture and have pure doctrine. Scripture has the first and last word of everything we do. Over the past half century, we have spent a lot of convention time condemning the doctrinal positions of many of these other groups. I'm not saying that we shouldn't be doing this, but I am saying that it should be done in the most loving way possible.

How do we do that? First of all, we need to recognize what the issue is that we are dealing with. Are we dealing with something that God has spoken about in His Word, or is this "adiaphora," (something that is neither commanded or prohibited in Scripture)? Scripture doesn't speak to what kind of Baptismal Font we should have, what style of music we should have, or even what kind of vestments should be worn. Yes, Scripture does speak to issues like abortion, homosexuality, and women's role in the church, but we haven't always done a good job of articulating the rationale for those positions.

So, how should we navigate our way through these kinds of conflict within the Church? First of all, go to God's Word. What does God have to say on the issue? In most cases there is also a rationale, and it always has our best interests in mind. If God is silent, then say so and give your neighbor the benefit of the doubt. Second, articulate the impacts. How does this action affect other people? Does it benefit or harm relationships? Does it undermine what God has done for us? Thirdly, keep the focus on the issue. Don't make it an attack on the person. Fourthly, make a distinction between full pulpit fellowship and welcoming your neighbor. While it may not be appropriate to share the Lord's Supper with someone who does not believe in the real presence and does not perceive the body, we can still

love them and welcome them. This is true whether you are looking at the congregational level or the synodical level. We can have pure doctrine and love our neighbor.

So, how should we deal with our fellow Christians who have different doctrinal viewpoints? First of all, let them know that we love them despite the issues that we disagree on. How can we convince someone of a doctrinal error if we can't even have a civilized conversation? First and foremost, love your brothers and sisters in Christ. Know that Jesus will sort it out in the end. Secondly educate them on our understanding of the significance of the Lord's Supper and why we don't wish for anyone to receive it in an unworthy manner. Make sure that they know they are still able to receive a blessing if they don't feel that it's appropriate to commune at this time. There is no shame in this.

The group of believers I think seem to get this more than any other group are our young children. I see young children go out to make the new kid feel welcome. I saw elementary school children band together to make meals for homebound seniors during the pandemic. I have also seen children give away their toys at Christmas so that other kids may have something. When I see these children spring into action, I begin to see what Jesus meant when He said that we must inherit the Kingdom of God as children. They serve as a great reminder to us all and they all make us proud. As we age, it's so easy to get bogged down by all of the negatives.

Sometimes, its ok to act like a child. So go ahead, act like a child – a child of God, who reflects the love that Jesus first showed us. Have patience with others just like God and our parents first had patience with us.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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Quotations from Scripture come from:

Various Authors. *The Lutheran Study Bible*. Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.