

## SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

One of the premier characteristics of the church that we are learning from our current Sunday School series is that it is one body consisting of many members. This is the recurrent emphasis of the apostle Paul in his first letter to the church at Corinth. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ... For the body does not consist of one member but of many... If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." vv. 12, 14, 17-20, 27. The necessity of the unity and diversity of the members of the church is reflected and paralleled in the diversity of the Spiritual gifts the Lord has given to his body in order to strengthen and build it up in its unity and maturity, see vv. 4-11.

From this perspective, we can clearly see that within the body of Christ, the characteristics of unity and diversity are not in conflict; the former is reflected in the latter which in turn strengthens it. Thus, the members of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ are bound together in an inseparable, interlocking and interdependent relationship that flows from their union together in Christ and that is witnessed in their communion with one another, the communion of the saints. One of the divine purposes of this holy communion is simply this: "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." vv. 25-26. I'm sure we recall Rom 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."

Within the last few months at All Saints Redeemer Church, we have all been made aware of the pressing needs of some of our families. These necessities have come to us by way of private and public testimony and by the departure of family members. In addition, we have all seen the obvious expressions of pain, difficulty and stress on their faces. The questions confronting us today are, using the Word of God as our basis and chief means: how many of us have taken (and are still doing so) the time and effort to comfort our brothers and sisters? How many of us have made deliberate, conscious commitments to be their instruments of blessing and healing? How many of us have gone the extra mile, that is, have gone out of our way, to reach out to them in meaningful and measurable aspects?

Now, I know that it is easy for us to mention "nice" platitudes like "I'm praying for you"; "call me if you need anything"; "the Lord is an on-time God"; and so on. However, rejoicing and suffering with our brothers involves much more than uttering such safe and prosaic expressions. The Scripture admonishes us to speak the truth in love, Eph 4:15. Further, the apostle John commands us "to not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." 1 Jn 3:18. In other words, Christians are to be their brother's keeper, that is to say, to demonstrate the true meaning of the communion of the saints by ministering the Word of God in response to their current needs and by aiding them in material ways, v. 17.

Now this requires that we are to know our brothers and sisters intimately for how can we minister to them if we are not familiar and empathetic with their conditions? How can we serve them and build them up in the faith (and strengthen the body of Christ in the process... to the glory of God) if we are not exercising the initiative to truly know them as the Lord requires of us? How can we truly love them if our relationship with them goes no further than brief Sunday and midweek encounters that occur in a "safe zone"? How can we love them if we are not willing to take the risks of being open and transparent, willing to let our true selves with all our warps, warts and wickedness be revealed in the process of serving them? Have we forgotten that our ministry to others is to be done in the strength of our Lord? Have we disregarded our Lord's assurance that his power is made perfect in our weakness and that when we are weak in ourselves then we are strong in him? 2 Cor 12:9-10.

How sinful and how self-defeating it is for us to refuse to satisfy the needs of our brothers and sisters by "minding our own business" or by "keeping ourselves to ourselves." In addition to establishing relationships within the church based on personal preferences of others, subjective sentiments and superficial standards rather than on the eternal foundation of the Word of God, these attitudes undermine the unity and holiness of the church by promoting a spirit of self-centeredness. Superficiality, selfishness and mediocrity have no place in the body of Christ. They expose a vile carelessness and contemptible indifference that are incongruous with the transformed lives required of those that are born of God. "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." 1 Jn 4:9, 11

Let us turn from this sin by seeking the forgiveness of our Lord and then by seeking our neighbor in word and in truth.