

Greetings to each of you in the name of Jesus Christ.

The annual journey to the Cross through Lent and the celebration of the Risen Lord on Easter Sunday morning have been joyous. We continue our faith growth and examination during this month as our liturgical calendar moves toward Pentecost. The personal examination for each one of us is to know, *what effect does (y)our Christian faith have on (y)our interactions with others*. There are many who claim Christ as Saviour, but the way they treat people does not match their claim. No one of us does this perfectly, but our reputation in and outside the church ought to increasingly reflect the life of Jesus, the risen Lord, within us.

I believe it is important to have the right theology and doctrine to help us be grounded in the truth, but if do not live out what we say we believe, we miss what God intends. The church is to be a witness to the community around us and to be a haven of safety for the gathering of the believers. Jesus said, *By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another*. [John 13:35].

When Peter wrote his first letter, he explained how believers should respond to the people in their lives. He wrapped it up with these words: *Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind*. [1 Peter 3:8]. These are the qualities that should characterize each of us in our interactions with each other.

First, we are to live in harmony with one another (unity). This does not mean we must all agree on every interpretation and application of Scripture or approach to ministry. The body of Christ consists of all kinds of people with differing personalities, perspectives, spiritual gifts, and interest, and each one is essential. Like a musical composition with many parts, the differing harmonies in the church gives depth and richness to the body of Christ. But if we do not have the unity of the Spirit as our conductor, we will all be singing our own tune, resulting in chaos and discord.

Paul described it like this: *walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. (Ephesians 4:1-3). When we are all yielded to the Spirit's leading, we have His power and grace to behave as those who bear Christ's name.

Second, Peter tells us to be sympathetic. This is more than just expressing words of comfort; it means being willing to suffer with those who are hurting. We come alongside them in their need and pain to help bear their burden. This requires a self-sacrificial attitude. We would much rather *rejoice with those who rejoice* than *weep with those who weep* (Romans 12:15). But sympathy is an important

Christlike characteristic. Accounts in the gospel repeatedly say that Jesus felt compassion for the people and did what He could to relieve their suffering.

The third quality we need in our relationships, is brotherly and sisterly love. Romans 12:10 describes this as devotion to one another as if we were all in the same family. And that is what Christians are - members of God's household. And the one who teaches us to love is the heavenly Father (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). Our responsibility is to practice and excel in loving our fellow believers - not just the ones whom we like, but all of them. Our common bond is not our interests, personalities, or preferences, but the oneness we have with each other in the Godhead (John 17:21).

Next, we need to be kindhearted. This is the opposite of being harsh, insensitive, self-centred, and uncaring. Ephesians 32 enlarges our understanding of what it means with these instructions: *Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.* In all our interactions we should seek to do good to others, treat them graciously, and not hold grudges. And it all flows from a heart that is yielded to God and seeks to please Him in our relationships.

Finally, we must be humble in spirit. Nothing hampers relationships like pride, but having a modest opinion of ourselves keeps us from being self centred and self seeking. Instead of focusing on ourselves, we put others first and consider them as more important (Philemon 2: 3-4). Our goal is not to receive the credit for what ever we do but to serve one another without recognition.

If all these qualities characterize us, how will they affect our interactions with others? It is fairly easy to get along with those who are kind in return, but the real test comes when there are conflicts. That is when we must choose not to act like the world. Instead of trading insult for insult or taking revenge, we are called to give a blessing (1 Peter 3:9-11). The believer should be known as peacemakers, not troublemakers. Rather than leaving a trail of criticism, dissension, and disharmony in our wake, we must seek to pave a pathway of reconciliation and peace. That is how we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and reflect Christ likeness in our attitudes, words, and actions.

As we consider our relationships, let us remember that how we treat other people is a powerful witness to the world and an example to those in the church. Sometimes God puts us in situations of conflict and animosity, so He can demonstrate through us His mercy, grace, love, and forgiveness. The most difficult relationships are not a curse but a blessing, and if we respond with a humble, compassionate, and kind spirit, we will bless others also.

As we continue the next stage of interim ministry together, let us pray together for God's guidance and encouragement. Truly we are called to be one big family in Jesus Christ.

Blessings and Shalom! *Jan*

