

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, August 26, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 478, 351:1, 464, 416, 644.

Lessons: Psalm 34, James 3:2-13, John 13:34-35.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 3:8-12

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Earlier you heard Peter say in 1 Peter 2:11-12: *"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*

"Submit yourselves" (v. 13) God says, and then Peter has addressed specific groups: servants, wives, husbands, and now he says *"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble."* What a beautiful conclusion to this section! Peter now turns to another type of relationship: relationships with our fellow believers.

CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR – ESPECIALLY TOWARD ONE ANOTHER

- 1. All Christians are to live and to love as brothers.**
- 2. God teaches this plainly in the Old Testament too.**

Live in harmony, God says to believers. Get along with one another, for you are all part of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. You just sang "Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Christian love." (The Lutheran Hymnal 464:1) You have far more in common with one another – those in this room – than with anyone else in the world, don't you? So why not treat them that way.

Many have learned that family is important. That's why we gather with family at times. But many of us – I daresay all of us – have family who do not believe as we do. They show that by their membership in other churches – or participation in no churches. Many of our family have even turned their backs on God, to our sadness and to their ultimate eternal sorrow – unless they repent. Blood ties, human families only have so much in common. They are composed of sinful human beings, many of whom never imagine saying "I'm sorry" to one another and then saying "I forgive you" when they themselves are wronged.

But now Peter says: show your Christian love AND in that way be examples to the pagan world, *"that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."* 1 Peter 2:12. That's what you want, isn't it? Whether it is from those with whom you may have blood ties or people at the farthest ends of the earth? You want them to learn of Jesus Christ, believe in him as their Savior, and live eternally.

So Peter is speaking to everyone in the Christian community – the visible Christian community, which we call 'church' and telling them to *"live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble."*

What do your words and actions show? What do people see about your lives that they admire you for, or more importantly, what do they see about your lives that they secretly despise you for? How do you treat your fellow confessors of Christ? How do you treat especially those in this room?

Don't we all know people who are nice to everyone else except their family? Don't we all know people who are mean to one another, or ignore one another, or don't show any love to one another for one reason or

another? What kinds of excuses have been used for such behavior? “Because I can.” That’s an excuse used by many people for doing exactly what they want, for doing their own thing, and in the process hurting people around them. Or “they aren’t always nice to me”. Or “once upon a time they did something bad to me”. Or “I don’t care how they treat me.” Or “Does it really matter?” Well, of course it does. You are dealing with another human being with emotions and feelings, just like you. Or – well, aren’t there many reasons we just aren’t nice to people? We can blame our sinful flesh, or circumstances, or forgetfulness or any number of things. But God’s Word here says that we are NOT to be that way especially to fellow believers, fellow confessors of Christ, our CHRISTIAN family.

God through Peter here says ***“Live in harmony with one another”***. He doesn’t just say “behave” that way, but make it a way of life. There are many ways in which people don’t live in harmony and love with one another. Just one is the idea of holding grudges. Many years ago, before I was a pastor, I remember a woman telling me how hurt she felt because the pastor didn’t shake her hand after church! How foolish! Would it have been an intentional slight? I doubt very much that it was. At Faith, you have an orderly dismissal which allows the pastor to shake hands with almost everyone – unless they left the sanctuary early. At Christ Our Redeemer, we have a rather disorderly procedure of dismissal that doesn’t allow everyone to pass me by so I can shake your hand. But I do try to greet everyone before or after our worship services but am sometimes not able to do so.

The sin-sickness in our hearts leads to all kinds of sin in Christian congregations: quarreling, coldness, resentment, pride, a desire to control others or situations, ‘turf protection’, and the desire for revenge. But the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit changes these attitudes, and Peter urges his Christian readers to let the Holy Spirit work the following qualities in their relationships with fellow Christians. He used five different words in this admonition.

“Harmony”. This is a conscious desire to work together with people to suppress one’s own ego and deep desires and choose to adapt to the needs and wants of others.

“Sympathy”. This is a conscious decision to be interested in someone else’s problems instead of just your own. This is entering into and experiencing the feelings of another. The Greek roots of the word mean ‘feeling with’, or ‘suffering with’ This is exactly what Christ did for us, for he suffered for us. We read in Hebrews 4:15: ***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.”*** And this is what we can do for other suffering Christians who often have similar experiences which should lead to sympathy for them, as we read in Hebrews 10:33-34: ***“Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.”***

“Love”. This central word of the five words is a conscious decision to be willing to go out of your way and give of yourself in order to bring good things to someone else. These five words – harmony, sympathy, love, compassion, humility – can be summed up in our text in loving your Christ-confessing brothers and sisters.

“Compassion”. This is a conscious decision to open up your hearts and feelings to another’s pain and trouble, to be tender and merciful with people. Christians care deeply about fellow Christians so that the suffering of one becomes the suffering of the other. Christians are to be emotionally involved with each other. Care for others. Put others first.

“Humility”. This is a conscious decision to think less of yourself and more of other people. Humility was the mark of Jesus. He has become our pattern, our role model, but not just in the sense of being only a role model. He is also our Redeemer, our Savior. He gave so much for us. In humility we will also be gentle. This is the conscious decision not to play the payback game but rather to put away all thoughts of revenge and return words and actions that are kind.

When Christian groups and specifically Christian individuals – yes I’m talking to you – exhibit these kinds of Christian characteristics, joy increases, unbelieving friends are drawn closer and find the message of the Word of God becomes believable and God is honored.

This is not the unity that comes from a standard imposed from outside the individual, such as a doctrinal statement, but that which comes from within the heart in which the Holy Spirit has done his work. It is Christ's mind and spirit that Christians are to share. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:16 ***"But we have the mind of Christ."*** and in Philippians 2:5 ***"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."***

Peter gives two specific examples: not returning evil for evil or insult for insult but instead giving blessing. ***"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."*** This is what we were called to do, how we were called to live, for we are Christ's. This is what we do that we might inherit a blessing. And remember that you don't have any choice in what you inherit. Someone else made that decision for you. In this case God chose what we will inherit. Inheritance depends on the generosity of the giver, not because of what one has earned.

Peter then quotes from Psalm 34, our Old Testament lesson. ***"For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'"***

God is certainly consistent. He doesn't say one thing in Old Testament times and something different in New Testament times. Unfortunately, many visible churches have taken to changing their views, trying to change what God says to make their message more palatable or better received. In the world today we find even older people living together without marriage, and even having such unions blessed by "ministers". But our God is unchanging, and we are sternly warned not to add to his Word, subtract from his Word or twist and change his Word in any way.

Restraining the tongue and doing good are part of the essence of this section, of being good and God-pleasing citizens, good servants, good spouses. Stop the tongue from saying any base thing. Stop the tongue from guile. James in our Epistle lesson speaks to that very thing.

Sure, we are wronged. It happens even every day, even at the hands of fellow confessors of Christ – I'm using that term in addition to 'fellow Christians' because it makes the term more personal and local. You and I know that there can be Christians everywhere the Gospel is preached. But those who confess Christ with you are those gathered right here.

What good does it do if you say or think you love your neighbor but don't show it?

Some churches have the custom at a certain point in the worship service of inviting everyone to look around them and greet the people sitting near them, to realize that they have something in common.

In the Old Testament God spoke at times of life and good days as if this were long life and prosperity on earth. In the gospel context this is the believer's eternal inheritance, that is, eternal life and good days with God – whether experienced here on earth or fully experienced in heaven.

Scripture speaks often of the idea and importance of loving one another. For example, we read in 1 John 4:11 ***"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."*** Peter has given us some specifics in how we may show that love.

"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."

In the coming verses, Peter points again to the sufferings of Christ. He suffered for us. His great love for us saved us and is a model, a pattern, a guide for the life of the Christian. And so we want to show that love, especially to one another so that all the world may see and come to know Jesus Christ as Savior. May we live always as God's loving children, in thought, in deed, and in word! Amen.