

20200607 – Year A – Trinity Sunday
The Rt. Reverend Denise Ferguson

Focus Reading: 2 Cor 13:11-13

At the conclusion of his second letter to the people of Corinth, St Paul wrote

¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, 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 God's people here 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.

The people of Corinth had been deeply divided as they struggled to embrace this new Way of Christ. Paul had visited, sent representatives and letters to educate, support, and at times, chastise the people in their mission. Paul had almost been in despair over the situation, however he still hoped and prayed that reconciliation might be accomplished, that truth would prevail, and that his authority could be used for building up the community rather than destruction. He urged the community to keep peace and blessed them. Ultimately his perseverance was successful as there was a restoration of order in the church.

His final words to this divided and fragmented community seem most appropriate as we celebrate Trinity Sunday in 2020.

Rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace: An encouragement to find a way to be community despite the challenges of life, with the assurance that the Triune God: The God of grace, love and fellowship would be with them always.

The heart of the Holy Trinity is love, self-emptying and sacrificial giving. An ultimate model of unity, communion, and community.

Paul understood the need for the people of Corinth to find a way to be strong as they built a community based upon a new Way, the Way of Christ.

Paul recognised the power of the model of the Trinity: The gift of and need for 'The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' to sustain and nourish unity, communion and community.

As I was preparing this sermon, I found an insightful quote from Sister Joan Chittister, an American Benedictine nun, theologian, and author on the value of being community. She writes:

"In community we work out our connectedness to God, to one another, and to ourselves. It is in community where we find out who we really are.

*It is life with another that shows my impatience,
and life with another that demonstrates my possessiveness,
and life with another that gives notice to my nagging devotion to self.*

Life with someone else, in other words, doesn't show me nearly as much about his or her shortcomings as it does about my own....

*In human relationships I learn that theory is no substitute for love.
It is easy to talk about the love of God; it is another thing to practice it."*

Grappling with being community didn't mean relationships would be perfect, but the Holy Trinity did give a framework, a foundation on which to grow and learn; about "...our connectedness to God, to one another and to ourselves."

This was the message Paul was trying to convey to the people of Corinth. This is the message of the Trinity to us today.

To paraphrase Archbishop Philip Richardson, from the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, speaking on Pentecost Sunday, *'the church is called to be a foretaste of the community to which the Holy Trinity witnesses. We, as communities of faith and as followers of Jesus are called to be a living parable of the inclusive, open, forgiving, enabling, serving community that the vision and the hope of the Holy Trinity calls forth'* so that all might have life and wholeness.

No one said it would be easy. *"We know through experience that it is easy to talk about the love of God; it is another thing to practice it."*

However, rather than this wonderful model and pathway for humanity, the reality I have witnessed this past week has been very different.

As I have watched the news unfold night after night and seen the decimation of *'one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all'*. I have grieved deeply.

It is not my place to comment on the politics of another nation. However, as a bishop in the church of God I weep as I witness the disintegration of all our Triune God of grace, love and fellowship, unity, communion and community represents.

What has gone so wrong?

The world is slowly emerging from a Pandemic that has caused death, destruction, separation of and from community. During this time, we have witnessed some of the most beautiful acts of love and kindness, humanity reflecting the *living parable of an inclusive, open, forgiving, enabling, serving community that the vision and the hope of the Holy Trinity calls forth'*. It has

been heart-warming to hear and share the stories. Expressions of love for the common good rather than the self.

In addition, as we bridged the days between Ascension and Pentecost the western Christian Church embraced a common bond of Prayer for Christian Unity, a unity we see at the heart of the Trinity, and for *'Thy Kingdom to Come'* on earth as it is in heaven.

Here in Australia we joined together, the secular and the sacred, to participate in National Reconciliation Week, and the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation as an ongoing reminder and commitment to the journey of reconciliation for all Australians; A journey that has at its heart respectful relationships between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, working together to close the gaps and to achieve a shared sense of fairness and justice. A nation working together to build *'an inclusive, open, forgiving, enabling, serving community.'*

We have witnessed and been a part of a pandemic of kindness, intentional prayer for unity, a commitment to work toward reconciliation: Unity, community, and communion at its best.

But have we listened and learned, for that is the real test of community?

As Joan Chittister said

*'It is in community where we find out who we really are.
It is life with another that shows my impatience,
and life with another that demonstrates my possessiveness,
and life with another that gives notice to my nagging devotion to self.'*

Now we are learning in a very painful way that to be community takes more than well-meaning intention. It takes deep listening, especially with those who have been pushed to the margins of society. It takes sacrificial grace, love and fellowship. It takes action.

We are seeing firsthand that it *"is easy to talk about the love of God; it is another thing to practice it."*

Growing as community means naming and owning our faults, our sins, our complicity in injustice; to first peoples, minority ethnic communities, and all who have been marginalised. It means true repentance and metanoia; genuine change and intentional commitment to honouring all humanity.

For the people of God, the Church, it means *'becoming a living parable of the inclusive, open, forgiving, enabling, serving community that the vision and the hope of the Holy Trinity calls forth'* so that all might have life and wholeness.

This time is deeply painful for so many.

Pray for healing and wholeness for all who weep and watch and grieve.

Pray for wisdom and discernment for our leaders.
Pray for a change of heart.

As we reflect on what this might mean, for us individually and as sacred and secular communities I leave you with the words of St Paul to the people of Corinth;

¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, 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 God's people here 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.

Amen.