

## Trinity Sunday

2 Corinthians 13. 11–end

Rev Dr Jos M. Strengtholt

In his final words to the church in Corinth, our apostle Paul writes a few things that, I think, are useful in the complicated Corona-days in which we live.

Corona days? Actually all days are days of our Lord. He wears the crown, our God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He rules the universe. He rules us.

That is why we listen to his word.

Let us first pray for his Word to work in us.

### 1. Four final commands

In his final words to the church in Corinth, now in Greece, Paul has four commands for the believers, and he throws them at those people in a staccato rhythm

Put things in order,  
listen to my appeal,  
agree with one another,  
live in peace.

Have you noticed, that in insecure times, people have a tendency to be more tense, more irritable, not you ofcourse, but others?

When the tectonic plates under our regular, orderly life seem to be shaking, many people become jumpy.

Think of those christians in Corinth. They suffered from tensions.

Only a few years earlier they had left their synagogues and pagan temples. So their worldview was changing. That in itself make people insecure.

that step led to friction with their families. You know how tense that makes us.

And then, they suffered from persecutions. People lost their jobs, some lost their income as well. I am sure some people needed financial help from their church. Times were hard.



They also suffered from leadership problems. New people had arrived in town who said they were better apostles than Paul. Stronger. With better miracles.

Problems outside, and problems inside the church. If you sit in the pew and you see this happen, you feel insecure. That is normal. Because things like this have deep impact on your life.

On top of this, Paul in his letter tells them to prepare a generous offering for their poor fellow Christians in Judea. They were suffering from hunger, as a famine had struck the region.

So, Paul says, give generously to show that we are one church, one body of believers.

In a time of tension in Corinth, where people needed comfort and help, would it not have been more logical to wait with that offering for Jerusalem?

'Paul, we have enough troubles here. When our problems are solved, then we can help the church in Jerusalem again'.

We know what Jesus said about visiting a persecuted Christian in prison; we know what He said about giving a hungry person food; we know his words about giving a glass of water to a thirsty man.

If there is a person in such need, and we are able to help, then dare you not refuse to help.

So Paul told them to have the offering for the poor in Jerusalem ready, as he was about to come to Corinth to pick up that money and take it to Jerusalem.

In the context of this appeal to have the money ready, Paul makes an interesting comment.

Paul and Titus will travel to Jerusalem with the money, but a brother has been appointed by the churches in Macedonia, to travel with them to deliver the money to Jerusalem.

Why had these churches appointed this additional person to travel with the money? In 2 Corinthians 8.20-21, Paul writes:

We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.

I find this an incredibly important principle in life. I personally may be convinced that my opinion is right and what I do is good in the eyes of God.

But it is also important to act in a manner that is acceptable for the people around us. To not create gossip, and unnecessary critique.

Of course this does not mean that as Christians we follow society slavishly. But when it comes to being careful with money, we do consider what people think.

And in our complicated days of Corona, we do the same. Whatever our personal views, or whatever the views of church council, we are considerate how our actions are seen by others.

We make sure that what we do is not only good in the eyes of God, but also of man.

And we are not so taken up by our own worries that we think of ourselves only. We also support people who are much worse off than we are.

Put things in order,  
listen to my appeal,  
agree with one another,  
live in peace.

Put things in order. When the tectonic plates under us move, we do not need to panic but we lead our ordered Christian life.

That may be hard. It may go against our natural inclinations at times.

But there is a promise related to this.

## **2. ... and the God of love and peace will be with you**

If you do what I command, Paul says, 'the God of love and peace will be with you.'

But so often we do not so perfectly live by the Gospel.

We do not always have our things in order.

We do not always listen so well to the apostolic word of God.

And about agreeing with one another and living in peace, we do mess up often enough.

We are not perfect. In our Christian life we sometimes reach for the stars, but we also go down Sheol. And then up again. Like a rollercoaster.

If God promises to be with us on the precondition that we abide by the words of Paul, does this mean that if we are not fully on the up all the time, that God is then not with me?

That is a good, a logical question.

In a general sense, God is always near. He is always with you. He is close to everyone.



Let me suggest to understand this statement of Paul slightly differently.

He is not so much promising the presence of God as such, but the presence of God who makes you experience his love and his peace.

Here we have a paradox. God's presence in our midst produces love and peace.... and we must have love and peace in order to have his presence?!

God gives what He commands, and even if we are imperfect in fulfilling his commands, He still gives. And gives.

Perfection, that we will not achieve in this life, but as one church father, Gregory of Nyssa said, "Perfection is in the striving. "

If we strive for putting our life in order and to live in peace, to agree with one another, then we are true followers of Jesus Christ.

Then God will fill us with more love and peace.

This seems to be the ongoing cycle in our life. With the little love and peace that we have in our hands, we go to God.

And he fills our hands and our heart with more love and peace.

But our heart and our hands seem like a sieve - we quickly lose what we receive. We are so porous. So imperfect.

Of the love and the peace of God we can never be satisfied, because we cannot contain it.

And even if we could, there is always more of his love and peace to enjoy, because his love and peace, and the joy he gives, are unlimited.

Don't we always desire for more? More of God's loving, peaceful, joyful presence?

Only after Paul speaks of this love and peace of God being near us, he then says we must greet one another with a holy kiss.

To greet one another with a kiss can very quickly deteriorate in a not so holy kiss.

Just look at Judas, who used a kiss to betray Jesus.

That kiss, symbol of love and peace, can too easily be fake and hollow, a symbol that has become separate from the reality that it should express.



From the times of the early church, a kiss was used to greet one another before celebrating holy eucharist.

That was in line with the cultural habits of those days - that is how you greeted people of the same gender.

Before we celebrate our meal of unity, we greet one another, to express that we will not allow anything in our midst to mess with our peace, love, and unity.

But fake love and peace in church are distasteful. Covering up underlying problems creates festering wounds and an unhealthy community.

Love and peace have to be real. But as I said, if there is just a tiny bit real, and we desire for more, then God is there. Ready to give.

Ask and it shall be given.

### 3. The blessing

And to underline this, Paul ends his letter with a blessing.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God, and the communion  
of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

These blessings in the end of Paul's letters, are not a pious wish. You have to see them in accord with Jesus who told his disciples, 'If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven.'

Likewise, the words of blessing of the apostles of Jesus are effective.

The blessing that St Paul uses does not contain a verb. It really says: "The grace of our Lord, the love of God and the communion of the Spirit WITH YOU ALL".

Paul is not expressing a wish, a desire that the people hopefully will be blessed.

He expresses a reality. By pronouncing the words, the people effectively receive the blessing.

Paul says to those insecure, quarrelling, imperfect people who really try to live in peace together and who really want to love God, but they have so little of it, that God gives them him grace, his love, his communion.

That is the ground of our existence.



And that is how we can be sure that our sieve - our porous heart - will always enjoy God's love and peace.

God is always with you to replenish your stock of love and peace and joy, if with the little bit you have you pray and ask Him to make those gifts of his presence overflow once again.

The Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, knows who we are. He sees our feeble efforts to walk, and sit, and live as Christians.

But the Lord Jesus Christ is gracious to you. He is.

God loves you. He does.

The Holy Spirit embraces you into the community of God. He does.

## **Conclusion**

And in that community of God, we as a fragile community, and we as individuals, receive everything that we might ever desire.

In the past months many people realised how important the community of Christians is for us. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, does it not?

But whether we can meet face to face or whether we miss that for now - our God, the Holy Trinity, is absolutely present in your life, to lift you up, and to fill your heart again, with love, peace, and joy.

## **Amen**