

“Grace That Unites”

Psalm 133; Ephesians 2:11-22

October 6, 2024 – World Communion Sunday

Introduction

- Conflict arises in our lives sometimes without warning.
 - o Things seem good, then, a flash and maybe the next thing you know you're out of whack with someone else.
 - It happens, even to the best of us, doesn't it?
- But, as we all know, conflict is hard to carry around.
 - o It weighs us down.
- Further, it prevents us from doing and being the people God wants us to be.
 - o Very clearly at the heart of the Scriptures is a unified people of God living at peace with God and with one another.
- Last week I told you a story about two sisters, divided late in life, squabbling over lottery winnings.
- This week, I bring you the historical relationship between Abraham Lincoln and Edwin Stanton.
 - o At the beginning of his presidency, Stanton belittled Lincoln, thinking little of his gifts for leadership.
 - Lincoln, not liking the man, still put him on his cabinet because he was capable.
 - He ended up becoming the Secretary of War during the Civil War.
 - o The two mended fences.
- Mending fences is very good for our souls.
 - o As I've said, we don't handle division well and it gnaws at us.
 - o It's particularly bad at night as we try to settle down and find our resentments and conflicts rising up, making sleep difficult.
- But there is a process, a means by which we can mend fences if we're willing and Paul gives us just a taste of it here in Ephesians.
- So, when you've got trouble with someone else, hear the wisdom of Scripture on what to do.

Step One. – Self-Examination

- In verse 12, Paul suggests *“remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”*
- As difficult as it is, the first step in resolving any conflict is to remember that you're not perfect.
 - o What?
 - What do you mean that the first step is to consider where you might be wrong.
- Very deliberately ask yourself “What did I do to make this situation go bad?”
 - o Now look, your first answer here is not going to be spot on, most likely.
 - None of us like considering where we might be wrong but it is essential for mending fences.
 - Because we are all sinners, most interpersonal conflict is seldom 100% right/100% wrong, generally there are shades of gray on both sides.
- Sermon on the Mount
 - o Jesus provides us more incentive for self-reflection in the Sermon on the Mount where He tells us to look at the log in our own eyes before we talk to others about the speck in theirs.
 - o **Matthew 7:3-5** – *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”*
 - It is Godly advice.
 - Consider the situation and where you have done wrong first!
 - o This is hard, requires the Holy Spirit.

- If you really go through the situation and can find that you've done no wrong.
 - o Good on the one hand.
 - o But, then maybe a better strategy would be to talk with someone else.
 - Gain an outsider's perspective.
 - Once, I was really caught up and angry with something somebody had done. But, when I talked with someone else, they were pretty certain I'd created the conflict.
 - o They were right. I had inadvertently.
 - Again, I wasn't 100% wrong but I was nowhere near 100% right, either.
 - This is a place where having a good Christian friend can really be a blessing.

Step Two – Seek Understanding, Listen Before Speaking

- First remember, Christ came to break down dividing walls.
 - o Ephesians 2 – *“For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in His flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility.”*
- In Kairos, we have a saying that I think is brilliant, it guides us on how we're supposed to deal with the residents.
 - o Listen, listen, love, love.
 - It really is that simple.
 - When you're in a conflict and you've first considered your own shortcomings, the next step is to try and discuss the matters with the person you're in conflict with.
 - o Again, this is a delicate step and one that requires great care.
- But when you get to that meeting, you'll need to take a different turn.
 - o Instead of listing your grievances, ask the other person to share with you their experience of the matter.
 - Then, SHUT UP AND LISTEN.
 - This is a huge and difficult step.
 - o Pride will be in your ear telling you to rebut every statement.
 - Don't
 - LISTEN, LISTEN, LOVE, LOVE
- **James 1:19** – *“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”*
- As you talk, really listen for the harm you've caused.
 - o While it might be minor compared to the injury you've sustained, remember the other person has feelings too.
- Listen and allow God to bring His peace into the situation.
 - o Do you remember “To Kill a Mockingbird?”
 - Great book, right?
 - Well, in it, Atticus Finch tells his daughter a very important lesson. He says to her “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view.”
 - How true.
- So, when a conflict arises, you've taken the time to consider your part in the conflict and have listened to the other side share their pain in the process.

Step Three. – Collaborate on Solutions

- If you've done things right, you're now ready to discuss soberly the way forward.
 - o Whenever injury is done, some form of atonement must be made to heal the relationship so it's going to take imagination to see things through to the other side.

- But remember, the Peace of Christ should exist in every relationship.
 - **Romans 12:18** – *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."*

Biblical Example: The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau (*Genesis 33:1-11*)

- Jacob and Esau had a **long-standing conflict** due to Jacob's deception in stealing Esau's birthright and blessing. After years of separation, Jacob feared Esau's anger, but he took steps toward reconciliation.
- In **Genesis 33:3**, Jacob humbly approached Esau, bowing seven times, which was a gesture of humility and peace. Jacob's actions acknowledged his wrong and extended an olive branch.
- Esau, instead of responding with vengeance, **ran to meet Jacob**, embraced him, and **forgave him** (*Genesis 33:4*). This act of **forgiveness** shows how reconciliation can break down the walls of hostility and restore relationships.
- **Application:** Just as Jacob and Esau reconciled by **taking active steps** toward one another, we, too, must work together with those we have hurt or who have hurt us. It may not be easy, but through Christ's grace, it's possible to rebuild even the most broken relationships.