

DCF:

He had served two tours in Afghanistan. Proud of his country and dedicated to serving, he gave up the comforts of life in the US. He left behind his wife and two children, his extended family, his air-conditioned house and his 1969 Camaro Z28. He served his country well, and now was coming home.

His plane landed safely in his home town. He grabbed his carry-on baggage and made his way to the gate in the terminal. Walking through the terminal and through security, he wondered who might be there to welcome him home. He hoped it was his wife and kids. That would be fantastic, he thought. Imagine his surprise when, after clearing security, his entire family was there! Not just his wife and kids, but also his parents. Aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, why, even grandma and grandpa! There were friends he hadn’t seen in years. All there to welcome him home, to rejoice that he had come home safely!

Today, after our tour in the battlefield of the corona virus, we’ve come home! **“TODAY, GOD’S FAMILY REJOICES!”** We are brought together by the Triune God and we are also moved by God’s love to care for one another.

Part One: We are brought together by the Triune God

The Corinthian church to which Paul wrote had gone through some painful times. Paul wrote several times to point out the sins that threatened to tear this church apart. They struggled with false teachers. They dealt with a messy, confused marriage situation. They battled cliques and social tensions. This was a congregation that really, really struggled to live as Christ wants us to live. We can barely imagine the hurt and the pain, the arguments and dissension that this congregation endured. If you’ve read through the letters Paul wrote to these believers, you might wonder how this church even continued to exist.

They did, because of God’s power. He gave them the faith to believe. They all believed that Jesus is God. They all believed that He paid for their sins. They all believed that He would come again and take them to heaven. They all believed in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The faith that God gave them bound them together and gave them the strength to endure the challenges that sin brought.

Our text is at the end of Paul’s last letter to this congregation. He reminds them that they are family. In spite of the pain and disagreements they had. ***“Finally, brothers, good-by.”***

Can you sympathize with the Corinthian Christians? I think we all can, to some degree. I still remember the arguments in my last church when the NIV came out and many people wanted to still use the KJV. I remember the struggle to adopt the hymnal we are currently using. Perhaps you’ve been in a congregation where there were doctrinal battles. Or, a congregation where there was a struggle as to what the mission of the church was. Sometimes, gossip can threaten to tear a congregation apart. Sometimes, it’s simply a group that wants to change things just to change things. Or, it may be a resistance to even think about change. When personalities are involved, there’s always tension. Unless...

Unless we remember who brought us together in the first place. You know who it is. It’s the Triune God who has gathered us. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all intimately involved in building and maintaining this congregation. Paul refers to this in our last verse. ***“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”*** That’s what brought us together. That’s what keeps us together.

Let’s take a closer look at this, ok? First, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that grace is getting what you don’t deserve. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is His payment for our sin. On the cross, Jesus paid for our lies, our hurtful words, our sinful anger and our stubborn refusal to listen to Him. On the cross, Jesus paid for our apathy in living for God, our laziness in loving our neighbor, our grudges against anyone that doesn’t want to do what we want to do. His grace is just one part of God’s family building effort.

The second thing that brought us together and keeps us together is the love of God the Father. His love moved Him to give us life and to keep us alive here on this earth. He protects us from all sorts of things that would destroy us. He gives us health and keeps us alive so we can do His will. He placed us in a safe environment and gave us good government. He directs and controls this world so that we might be blessed in oh, so many ways. It’s not an accident that we can gather together and worship Him here in Green Bay. It’s because of the love of the Father that this is possible.

The third thing that brought us together and keeps us together is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who created faith in our hearts. He is the One who continues to sustain and build up that faith through the Word and Sacraments. He is the One who opens our eyes to see and our brains to understand what God has done

for us and what He wants from us. All three persons of the Trinity were actively involved in bringing us into God's family. All three persons of the Trinity are actively keeping us together in the one true faith.

Even though we haven't gathered as a family here in church these past three months, our Triune God has certainly been active, hasn't He? He cared for us, His family. We've been reminded of Jesus' forgiveness often, by various means. He's kept us safe from disease or death, by various means. And the Holy Spirit has been working overtime, strengthening us through the Word by various means as well. Our Triune God has kept us His family together during some unusual, trying times.

Now, we're able to gather together once again. Now, what do we do? We are moved by God's love to care for one another.

Part Two: We are moved by God's love to care for one another

We've all been on a vacation of sorts these last few months. Oh, it's a vacation we didn't want to take. It was forced upon us by the corona virus pandemic. Some of us have chosen to travel to this building to once again worship our Lord, and it feels good to come home. Some of us are still traveling what I call the roads of the virus. They aren't comfortable gathering together yet. We all want to care for God's gift of life in the best way possible, and in their risk calculations have decided that now is not the best time to gather together in worship. And that's ok! All of us travel the roads of the virus with different loads.

Some of us have easier loads. Some of us have heavier loads. Some of us are younger, healthier and blessed with strong immune systems. Some of us are older, with health conditions that would take us down quickly. Some of us have weighed the risk and have come. Some of us have weighed the risk and are staying home. No matter what group you fall into, you are still a member of one group - God's family. He loves us all equally, no matter where you are worshiping Him today! We are the children of God, fellow inheritors of heaven!

God's love for us moves us to care for one another. We want our fellow believers to know that we care for them. We understand their fears and concerns. We want them to be sure of our love for them. We want them to know that we will always greet them with a smile on our faces and love in our hearts. We want to do whatever we can for them, especially their faith. We want to follow God's directions given through the apostle Paul in verse 11: ***"Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."***

Loving one another in this sinful world isn't easy. Our sinful nature is egged on by Satan to oppress, destroy and demonize one another. We want our way. We are selfish, untrusting of others and so often afraid of anyone who doesn't look like us, talk like us or live like us. Our world and our culture also makes it difficult to care for one another, too. There are painful divisions in this world. There's economic division between rich and poor. Some people want to keep what is theirs and others just want to survive and provide for their family with the crumbs that fall from the table. There's racial divisions, too, as our country has experienced time and time again. Division, resentment, injustice and outright brutality and oppression makes it hard to love and care for one another.

But, aim for it. Remember God's love and will for all people. He wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He treasures each and every soul, and values us the same. We are all priceless in God's eyes. As God loves and values us, so ought we to love and value one another. That's easier to do with believers than unbelievers, isn't it? We know we're spending eternity with them in heaven, so that makes it easier to love and forgive, to care for and live in peace. But what about unbelievers?

Maybe this will help. Treat your unbelieving friends as "not yet" members of God's family. Treat your unbelieving friends as "not yet" at the family reunion. In some families, they plan a family reunion every year. Of course, there will be members of the family that can't make it. Some live too far away. Others will have work commitments. Still others might have a birth or a wedding that prevents them from coming that year. But, whether they are present or not, they are still members of that family. And sooner or later, they will gather with their family.

It's been a long, unwelcome vacation for many of us. But at no point did we ever drop out of God's family. For all His blessings, on this Trinity Sunday, ***"TODAY, GOD'S FAMILY REJOICES!"*** We have been brought together by the Triune God. Moved by God's love, we care for one another.

AMEN