

Forming Relationships – Week 5

October 11, 2020

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

“Forming Relationships” is one of three ways that we glorify God and make disciples for Jesus here at Our Savior's Way. And In our sermon series, we're continuing to look at how we “Form Relationships” with God and with others. How He calls us to love and serve those around us – regardless of race, nationality, or gender – so that they too might come to experience His love.

Now at this point in our sermon series, you might be wondering how His love comes about in relationship...but before we address that question, I want to share with you how the church at Corinth began because it will help our understanding.

It was during St. Paul's second missionary journey in 50 A.D., that he stopped about 48 miles west of Athens in the Roman city of Corinth. At that time, Corinth was a metropolis and the capital of Achaia (ah-KAY-uh). Located along a trading route, it was there that St. Paul formed relationships with others, like Pricilla and Aquilla. He worked and stayed with Pricilla and Aquilla during his 18 months in Corinth and together they formed relationships, and the church was formed in Corinth, before moving on to Ephesus.

During his third missionary journey, after returning to stay in Ephesus for three years, St. Paul began to hear about the divisions that were occurring within the church at Corinth. And while God gives different spiritual gifts to each person,

and it can seem like there's always another opinion, after hearing what was happening among the members of the church at Corinth, St. Paul felt compelled to write to them. Because relationships were being formed in conflict with God and with others. St. Paul wrote to address the issues and to help them better understand how Godly relationships are formed and sustained.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul wrote that while knowledge puffs up because only the person who holds it benefits, its love that builds up. And so, as we heard in our epistle reading, St. Paul shares that it doesn't matter how many languages you can speak, how much insight you might have, or how much you give of yourself, if it is not done with love, it will never amount to much of anything. Because in the end, prophecies will pass away, languages will cease to be spoken, and specific knowledge will be lost over time.

That's why he shares that there is a more excellent way. Better than any relationship that's used to benefit someone or another for a time, because it's one that is based on love. Love that doesn't envy or boast. It isn't arrogant or rude. It doesn't insist on its own way. It isn't irritable or resentful. It doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing, but rather rejoices with the truth. It is patient and kind. It bears all things and believes all things. It hopes and endures all things. And love is what matters most in forming and sustaining relationships because it comes from God Himself. For ***"anyone who does not love, does not know God, because God is love."*** (1 John 4:8)

God's love was made flesh and blood when He sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, into the World. So that by His sacrificial love on the cross, through His death and resurrection, full atonement might be made for the sins of the whole world. Those sins that we commit, when we fail to

see and respond to those around us in need of His love. For the sinful relationships that we form and sustain, that either knowingly or unknowingly – causes hurt in others. God loved us so that we might have life in Him. Life in a relationship with Him is filled with love not only for us but also for those around us.

It's His Spirit that comes to us through His Word so that we might be guided along life's way to eternal life. And we come to realize that we did not love Him first, but that He loved us so that we can form and sustain relationships in His love. He is the one who forms that loving relationship within us by His Spirit who comes into our lives at baptism. And He is the one who nourishes it when we receive His very body and blood, given in – with – and under the bread and the wine – through Holy Communion. And it is His Spirit who gathers us together either in person or virtually, in order to strengthen this loving relationship with Him and with others, giving us the ability to share His love with the world around us.

Now, there's a story of a man who remembered a time when he went on a youth trip for the first time. Only ten years old at the time, it was the longest trip he had been away from home by himself and he could still remember how homesick he was those first few nights. All he wanted to do was to see his mom and dad again and have them take him home.

But he also remembered his camp counselor who said to him, *"Hey, why don't we go sit outside and talk about it."* Sitting down with him, the counselor listened about how homesick he was. Then he shared love and compassion with him. He told him that it would be alright and that they could talk anytime. During the day, he was busy with activities and wasn't lonely at all. And it was just those first few nights that he was homesick. And yet, it was because of the relationship

that the counselor formed with him that helped him to get through it.

This is what Christ's relationship does for us. He comes to us, puts His arm around us, and says, "Let's sit and talk awhile." He encourages us to keep going, to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, not growing weary. His loving relationship comes through His Word and it also comes through others who share His love with us.

Today, like the church in Corinth did so long ago, we can find ourselves trying to reason like children, especially when it comes to understanding God's love. And yet, His great love comes about when we hear and see Jesus through the words of Holy Scripture and as we try to pursue His love while sharing it with others. And - at times - while trying to see Him and His love can be like trying to look through a poorly lit mirror, there's a time that is coming when we will see His Love clearly because we'll see Him face to face, and be able to take in all His glory.

Until that day comes, as our text encourages us to do this morning, we'll go on to pursue His love and earnestly desire spiritual gifts so that we might accomplish the mission that He has given to us here at Our Savior's Way. And that mission is – *to glorify God and make disciples for Jesus by: Forming Relationships, Experiencing Jesus Together, and Sharing God's Love.*

In Jesus' name, Amen.