

14 Pentecost  
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Christ and Grace Episcopal Church

*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

*Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. Romans 13:8-14*

*Jesus said, "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Matthew 18:15-20*

Where two or three are gathered it can be hard to get along. Where two or three are gathered there must be face masks worn. Where two or three are gathered there seem to be so many difficult things we can no longer discuss in conversation. Are you feeling like that?

This can happen in our family, our workplace, our neighborhood, our church. Jesus seems to be making it clear that this can happen, that it will happen, never mind that it will be unbearably difficult in the perfect storm we live in right now with so much fear and distrust surrounding us... and within us.

At the time that the Gospeler Matthew wrote these words of Jesus' teachings, he was writing to a church that was enduring persecution, struggling with division over theological viewpoints, living in a world where politics were center stage and the oppressed longed to be free. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

In my time away beside the sea, I was mostly intentional about being off of the news cycle and the internet. I read some wonderful books. I spent treasured time with family. The world news events went on without my close observation. Instead, I watched the birds gathering in twos and threes and tens, and I let go of a lot of distractions.

I suspect that is what the Apostle Paul was getting at when he talked about love being the most important thing; then he listed those things that can be sinful, that distract us from our real life in Christ, things that can distract us from what is most important – love of God and neighbor, and I would also add family.

Paul reminded the church in Rome, as we are reminded today, that it is time, that now is the moment for us to wake from sleep, to lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. To put on, Paul says, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What might that look like, putting on Christ? I think we know in our hearts, if we've been paying any attention at all to the Gospel readings each week, we have heard and seen what Jesus does and calls us to do. But I suspect Paul knew that it was not always going to be easy. In fact, he had his own struggles, his thorn in the flesh, and the churches he founded on his journeys also struggled, as do we in all the challenges of our own lives.

Where two or three are gathered, there can be disagreement, or there can be love and either way, Jesus is right there in our midst, in the disagreeing or in the loving.

Jesus gives us some excellent ways in today's Gospel to move through disagreement to love, and we would do well to note them both in our family life and in the Church. And then, there is a surprise from Jesus. He says that when all else seems to have failed, when there seems to be no way to end a disagreement, we are to let that person with whom we most disagree be as a Gentile and a tax collector. It sounds, at first, as if Jesus is saying it's okay to ask the people we disagree with to just go away, to leave the community.

But this does not sound like the Jesus I know. And so, if we were to stop for a moment and put on Jesus Christ, what would we do? Jesus loved the Gentiles and tax collectors. He ate with sinners and healed the unclean. Jesus loved them into new life.

Where two or three are gathered, sometimes it can be hard to get along. We might think this is a new struggle but it's being going on ever since Adam and Eve in the garden.

Where two or three are gathered, there can be disagreement and there can be love, but either way, Jesus is going to be there, too.

What... or whom... are you going to put on today?