

## **Why Can't People Get Along, Even In Church?.**

**This is a question that really hits close to home. Perhaps it may not register with you ... that's a good thing! God has richly blessed our congregation of St. John with a minimal amount of controversy among her members. But, it isn't always that way. From time to time conflict does arise. Some congregations, sadly, are rife with it. Perhaps you've noticed that people don't seem to get along with each other all that well even in church! Is there something we can say about this close-to-home question? As God's children, there is no excuse for people to continue to hold grudges or hurts; but here's the real perspective to answer this question, "Where there are people, there is sin." And that includes being at church. The Bible doesn't evade this issue either. If we look in the book of 1 John, we read, "Since God so loved us, we ought to also love one another. And, if anyone says he loves God but hates his brother, he's a liar." The key here is to understand, then, what we mean by love.**

**As sinners, we come to church because we know that we need to repent and to receive God's forgiving love for ourselves. Church isn't a place for people who have it all figured out. It's a place to come where our lives can be redeemed and restored by the One who loves us and all people. So, if people aren't taking responsibility for their actions, that's a problem that needs to be addressed because God's love says so. In order for us to love each other as Christians, we need to start by admitting that we sin, we often mess up and we hurt others and we have to turn to the Lord, then, in repentance and faith.**

**There are going to be times when our foolishness gets the best of us, even with those we love and care for. The Christian faith is well aware of that as it calls all of us to the foot of the cross in repentance. But, the good news is that life doesn't have to remain that way. Faith in Christ also empowers us to live the life that God has given us in His Spirit!**

**There are no easy answers for all personal issues. It's always best to get specifics about a personal problem or argument before giving any advice. But there are some basic things that we all need to think about as God's forgiven, loved people. The first point is this, that Christians, even though they may act foolishly or maliciously, daily they are called back to repentance and faith, and then challenged by God's Spirit-filled Word, to look at the situation differently, namely through Christ's eyes. In that sense, faith is giving us a different perspective on things. If we truly believe in Jesus, then the question for all kinds of issues in our lives is "What does Jesus wish for us to do as His people?" And when it comes to dealing with hurts or anger or frustration, even with fellow believers, there is a third-party perspective that is real in our lives ... to see this in the light of Christ and the example that He set.**

**There's even more than that: how has Jesus treated us when we were hurtful to Him, what He did to us, what He did for us. Then look at that person standing before you, who has maybe hurt you. Then, think to yourself, if that person was me and I was Jesus, what would He do for me? Then prayerfully, by His Spirit, act accordingly. (over)**

**There's a small book in the Bible that speaks to this issue. It's the little book of Philemon. It tells the story of a runaway slave named Onesimus. We read in that book how people can be reconciled when they treat each other as fellow believers in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Paul literally is willing to pay the temporal price for the person who had done the offense ... Onesimus. Paul willingly made amends, paid his debt "personally," as Jesus did for him and more. That was key in this case to help reconcile Onesimus with Philemon. We're talking about a unique kind of love here, but it's not because Paul is perfect, or Onesimus is perfect, or Philemon is perfect. They had their good days and bad days, just like everybody else. But they also had a love from God that made all the difference. It was a love that needed to be received as well as shared. It challenged them daily to be different, with a Spirit-filled Word showing them how to love a totally different way than anything else in this world.**

**The end result prayerfully being: the world will begin to know that we are Christ's people because they see His love active among us, sometimes even in spite of us! Thank God for that! God grant we become better at practicing that love for each other.**

**That's the View from Here.**

**Pastor Bill Winter**