

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

People Of The Kingdom

PART

5

TITLE

Together While Apart

SCRIPTURE

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13



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Providence. It's joy to be with you this morning, to be in the word together. A few notes before I start, it is an important day for a couple reasons, one it's Father's Day, which we've already celebrated, it's important to celebrate, but it's also important for us as a church family to always remember that on a day like today, there's a range of emotions, right? So as we gather together, and as we care for one another, it's important to remember that a day like Father's Day brings a range of responses, because some of us have experienced the brokenness of this world. Some of us have lost a father, or some have lost a child, some have a strained relationship between them and their father or them and a child.

And so it's just a day that brings a range of things. But because of the grace of God, it's also a day that brings celebration and fatherhood when expressed rightly is an incredible picture of the goodness and care and protection of our heavenly father. So it's right and fitting to celebrate when we see a glimpse of true fatherhood in the world. So if you're a dad rejoice in your heavenly father today, strive to be like him. And if you see the grace of God in your dad's life, be sure to tell him about it sometime today and encourage him.

Today's not only Father's Day. It's also Juneteenth. Juneteenth was recently declared a federal holiday. Juneteenth is an annual celebration of what happened on June 19th, 1865 after the Civil War, federal troops marched to Galveston, Texas, where they informed what most believed to be the last remaining slaves in the country that the war was over and that they were free. In our history as a country, when it comes to slavery is a dark and sinful stain. It is painful for all of us to think about. And so celebrating the liberation of these last few slaves is something that we should rejoice over. There's evidence of God's grace and praise God that we've continued to grow as a country and seeing all people as created in the image of God. But we need to continue to pray because as long as we are sinful people, there will be some who will cling to racial division and hatred. And we have to continue to pray that God will heal what has been broken and that he will continue to restore. So let's pray now, as we pray for fathers, we pray for healing. And we pray for our time in the word together. "Heavenly father, it's a joy even to be able to call you that our heavenly father, that regardless of what our experience with fatherhood has been here on earth, you are a perfect father who's always good, always protecting, always providing, always caring for us. And so God, I pray that you would help us as fathers in this world to imitate you, to strive to be like you, that we might represent you well in our homes, as we care for and invest in the children that you have given us.

God, we pray for continued healing in this country. As we continue to see the effects of racism and hatred in this country, God, we pray for healing. We pray that you would sweep through this country, move in people's hearts and move us closer together. Help us all to see the value of each individual person. I pray that we would lead the way in this community here at Providence, that we would value each person, not because of where they come from or who they are or what they look like, but because they were created in your image, I pray that we would model that in this community, that all would see it in us, that we value each individual. And finally, God, I pray that you'd be with us now, as we open your word. In Thessalonians, we think about relationships and community this morning. How would you shape the way that we think. Would you give us faith to believe your promises and help us to trust you, to move into these relationships in this community

the way that you've called us to. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen."

Well, this morning we are continuing our series through the book of Thessalonians and the title of the sermon this morning is Together While Apart. And it's going to be about this relationship that has formed between Paul and the Thessalonians. And we're going to look at it as a framework for how to think about community in the kingdom of God, people of the kingdom have a way of going about relationships. And we're going to think about how we should do that this morning.

You think about the incredible bonds that are formed among people of the kingdom, these deep relationships that we see and that we should see. All this I think is very relevant as we think about the culture around us. And the culture around us is by every measure, experiencing more isolation and loneliness than ever before. Harvard just released a new study where they were surveying Americans and they found that 36% of all Americans, that's more than one third, including 61% of young adults and 51% of mothers with young children feel serious loneliness most or all of the time. But we don't need statistics to tell us that people are more lonely and isolated than they've ever been. We see it all around us.

Now, what is causing this problem though, there's lots of theories of what's causing it. Increases in technology, greater wealth gives us greater ability to isolate, people move from place to place more and more, the days of growing up in one community and spending your whole life there, are all but over. All of this leading to more isolation and less meaningful community.

But 1st Thessalonians is a letter that Paul is writing to the church in Thessalonica where, as we've said, the last few weeks, he's commending them for their faith. He can see that their faith is bearing fruit and he wants to encourage them by describing this fruit and calling them to pursue it all the more. They are people of the kingdom and people of the kingdom give the world a glimpse, a preview of what the kingdom of God is like and the redemption that Jesus is bringing into the world. And what we'll see in this text this morning is a glimpse of what community is supposed to really be like.

So if you have your Bible turn to 1st Thessalonians chapter two, starting in verse 17, 1st Thessalonians chapter two, starting in verse 17. And we're going to read all the way through chapter three. This is what God's word says. "But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at is coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone. And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and

just as you know. For this reason when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you, for this reason brothers in all our distress and affliction, we have been comforted about you through your faith.

For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what Thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day, that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus, with all his saints.”

As we observed this morning, the relationships that develop among people of the kingdom, the first thing that we’re going to see, and the first point for you to write down if you’re taking notes is that people of the kingdom serve one, another sacrificially. People of the kingdom serve one another sacrificially. So Paul starts this section by explaining why he hasn’t come back to Thessalonians.

Now, if you remember, Paul was only in Thessalonica a short time, in Acts chapter 17, it says he was there for three Sabbaths, and then his opponents ran him out of town. And it appears that they’ve been trying to cast doubt on his teaching by saying, “Look, he left and he never came back.” And Paul’s goal in this entire section is to explain how much he loves the Thessalonians and longs to be with them.

And so he says, verse 17. “But since I was torn away from you.” Now that word torn that he’s using there, is a word that is used for a child who is orphaned or a parent who has lost their child. So it’s a word expressing intense loss. It’s like losing a loved one. Paul is saying he lost them and it was against his will. It’s incredibly painful to him that he’s been torn away from them.

And then he goes on to say that he left in person, but not in heart. In other words, he may have left them physically, but he hasn’t stopped thinking about them. In other words, his heart never left. He’s still with them. He goes on to say that he’s been eager to get back, but he’s been hindered by Satan. He doesn’t tell us how Satan has hindered him or how he knows it’s Satan. But the point is that he wants to come back and he hasn’t been able to. And he’s saying it’s spiritual warfare. He’s been thwarted in his efforts to come back and see them.

And then he says something in verse 19 that I think is pretty amazing. He says, “For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus, that is coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy?” So here’s one of the places in this passage of scripture that I think the bond that exists within the Christian community begins to come out and we begin to see the unique nature of these relationships. Paul is talking

about the moment when he stands before the Lord, at is coming. So the day of his judgment, when Christ returns and Paul is looking him face to face, he says on that day, in that moment, guess what's going to be on my mind? The Thessalonians.

In that moment when Christ is standing before him. Think about that moment. Have you ever thought about what you will be thinking when you are looking Jesus face to face? There's a whole host of things that I can imagine would be going through my mind. And what Paul is saying here is that the thing that's going to be going through his mind, his joy, his crown of commendation, the thing that he is going to point to to say, "Look, Lord, I've been serving you." It's going to be the Thessalonians.

What will be your joy, your crown of boasting? Paul says it will be those that we have invested in, which leads him to say in verse one, "Therefore, because of this, because I feel this way, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone. And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions for you, yourself, know that we are destined for this."

Now the big idea here, which we're going to get to in a second is that Paul is willing to sacrifice for the Thessalonians, that's obviously the main idea, that's what he's trying to get across, but we can't ignore what he's saying about suffering here. He's concerned that the suffering that they are experiencing and the suffering that they're watching him experience is going to move them. In other words, he's concerned that it's going to disrupt their faith, it's going to move them away from what they have believed, it's going to undermine what he had taught them.

And what's interesting is that it says, he had already told them to expect suffering. So if you think back, Acts chapter 17, he was only with them a few weeks. He had just gotten to know them, he had just shared the gospel with them. And in those short few weeks, he had already said, be ready to suffer, expect suffering. Paul told the Thessalonians and we should be reminded that suffering is to be expected in the Christian life. It should be expected in life in general. And 1st Peter chapter 4, verse 12, Peter says this, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial, when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed, suffering will come."

And Paul is acknowledging here that it can take its toll on our faith. He was afraid that it might move them. He was afraid that it might disrupt what they believe. He says in verse five, "For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain." In other words, for fear that the tempter would slide in a moment of adversity and say, "God, doesn't care about you."

Suffering presents a temptation. Peter calls it a fiery trial, suffering can tempt us to think that God is not good

or that he doesn't care. Trials can tempt us to think that he's not paying attention or that he doesn't hear our prayers, but these are lies. God is good. And he's working in all things. He's working them together for the good of those who love him. Paul knows this. And because Paul has been through so many of his own trials, he is desperate to send Timothy to help them. He wants to send Timothy to establish and exhort them in the faith before they're moved by this temptation, he wants to give them a chance to grow roots so they can weather the storm.

In fact, he wants this for them so badly that it says he was willing to be left alone. He's willing to send Timothy away, even while he is facing his own trial, which is why I say that people of the kingdom serve one another sacrificially. Paul's heart is so bound up with the Thessalonians that he is moved to sacrifice for them. Like our heart should be bound up together. You are my glory and joy, and I am yours, which should lead us to serve one another sacrificially. But the question is, well, what does that mean?

I don't need you to send your traveling companion to me next time I am facing affliction, that's no longer what we do to serve one another. So how are we supposed to serve one another sacrificially? Well, it might be simple things like using my free evening to take your family a meal in a time of trial, or it may mean stepping out of my own day and my own list of tasks that I have to get done long enough to consider you and to consider the idea that you might need encouragement this week. It might mean spending 15 minutes in prayer to pray over that list of prayer requests that comes out from the life group each week, to labor over them and to serve one another sacrificially as people of the kingdom, this is what we should be doing.

Now, one interesting thing about this is that Paul isn't sending Timothy begrudgingly. He doesn't send Timothy because he has to, and because God has commanded him. And so if he's going to be obedient, he might as well. No, he sends him because he says he can't stand it any longer. He loves the Thessalonians so much and is so invested in their spiritual health that he had to send Timothy.

And as I was thinking about this week, it made me stop and ask. Are there people in my life that I love so much, that I must sacrifice for them? Are there people in your life who you love so deeply, and you're so concerned about their spiritual wellbeing, that you must sacrifice for them? If not, it's probably something to consider, where is your community? Are you in a life group? Are you serving on a team with other people so that you're growing in community together? Are there people that you are investing in? People that you are loving? People that you are desiring good for?

Community is a normal part of the Christian experience because God is a communal being, God designed us to exist in community. God created the world to be a place of community. And the fact that it isn't is evidence of the fall. That's not the way things were supposed to be. We were not created for isolation. And so as God's kingdom comes to reality among us, as the people of God, we should see a growing atmosphere of togetherness and community. And if we don't see that in our own lives, it should cause us to pause and evaluate, what should I do differently?

People of the kingdom serve one another sacrificially. And second, if you're taking notes, people of the kingdom love one another deeply. People of the kingdom love one another deeply. Verse six says, "But now the Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love, and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you. For this reason brothers, in all our distressed and affliction, we've been comforted about you through your faith."

Paul is so excited and relieved when he gets Timothy's report about the Thessalonians that he's comforted even in the midst of his own distress. So Paul is facing his own afflictions, his own persecution, but the news that Timothy brings him about the faith of the Thessalonians and their appreciation for Paul brings him joy in the midst of his trial.

He even says in verse eight, verse eight says, "For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord." Again, referring to how their lives are bound up together. He's saying, if the Thessalonians are standing firm, it encourages Paul to keep going, and he's hoping that his endurance will encourage them.

Verse nine, "For what Thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day, that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith." In other words, he's saying, we run out of words, trying to thank God for how we feel about you and the joy that's been produced. He's saying, "How could we ever thank God enough for his work in your life, sustaining you? How could we ever thank him enough for the joy that we feel over your faith?" This reminds me of Paul's instructions in Romans 12, verse 15, when he says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. This is the evidence that we are loving one another deeply." When I can feel joy in the midst of affliction because of your faith, I am loving you deeply. And when I can feel pain in the midst of my prosperity, because of your trial, I am loving you deeply.

Our lives are bound up together to the point that we feel with and for one another, that's what he's calling for. That when I hurt, you hurt. And when you rejoice, I rejoice. And when I rejoice, you rejoice. That we'd be bound up together, feeling together, experiencing life together. Now that's describing a level of intimacy that I think is strange in the world today. That our lives would be woven together to the point that even when I'm having a great day, if I see you having a bad day, I'm feeling that with you, I'm moved.

How do we do that? How do we weave our lives together in that way to create that kind of intimacy? That is the question. How is that even possible? That we would be so bound up together, that we would weep together and rejoice together and feel overwhelming gratitude for one another. Well it won't happen by just attending services? I don't even think it will happen by just attending a life group. I think it will take something much more intentional than that.

I think Paul gives us a hint what it is, what is required to create that kind of connection earlier in chapter two.

In chapter two, verse eight, this is what Paul says. He says, “So being affectionately, desirous of you.” So he was longing to connect with them, longing to be with them. He says, “We were ready to share with you, not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.”

What is it that had created this kind of connection between Paul and the Thessalonians? It was that Paul had come to them and been ready to share with them, not just the good news, but his own self. He had given himself a way to them. He had opened himself up to them. And this is how we build meaningful gospel community. We must give ourselves away. If you’re going to love and enjoy people, the way that God intended, you must give yourself away to them.

Now, I understand that what I am saying right now is countercultural, it’s strange, and maybe even something that is fearful. This is that we are taught from early on, not to do. If you give yourself away to people, you might get hurt. In fact, I would say, if you give yourself away to people and open yourself up to them, you will get hurt. Why? Because we are sinful broken people. And even the best among us are not perfect. And so if we are vulnerable with each other and we’re opening ourselves up to one another, we are going to offend each other. We are going to let each other down. We’re going to come up short. We will fail.

So why would we do it? Why enter into this kind of relationship if it’s going to be costly? Well, we will never experience the depth of community and the joy that comes with it without giving ourselves away. That’s why I’m calling it gospel community. The gospel teaches us that we must give ourselves away. God’s good news is that Jesus came to give himself away for our good. He who was rich, became poor so that we could become rich. He entered into our brokenness. He was far in distant, he came to be among us and then gave himself away, even though it cost him everything.

And why did he do it? So that he might have a relationship with us. He showed us the God of the universe and all of his wisdom and power, he showed us that self-sacrifice is worth giving to pursue relationships. That the fruit that will come from them, the joy that is found in relating to one another is far more valuable than anything it might cost us.

And so are you willing to give yourself away to the people of this church, even though it isn’t safe, even though it isn’t easy, it’s an act of faith. We must believe that it’s worth it. We must trust God and his design for us and believe that he is able to sustain us even in the difficulties that will come. We must believe that God is good, and his instruction in this is good. And in the gospel, he’s given us everything that we need to walk together. He’s given us the ability to be humble, to confess when we’ve messed up. He’s given us the ability to forgive one another as we have been forgiven in Christ. He’s given us the ability to pursue one another and to put the needs of each other before our own, all of these things, God has given to us through the gospel because he longs for us to walk in community, not just with him, but with each other.

Finally, Paul makes it clear that people of the kingdom pray for one another earnestly. That’s the last point,



if you're taking notes this morning. People of the kingdom pray for one another earnestly. He already said in verse 10, that he prays earnestly for the Thessalonians night and day. Paul loves the Thessalonians, in his life enjoys so bound up with them that it moves him to pray night and day. And he is not just praying, he's praying earnestly. What does that mean to pray earnestly? Well, you know what it means to ask earnestly for something.

Any parent knows an earnest request when they see one. You're walking through the checkout line and one of the kids says, "Dad, can I have that toy? That's just a normal request. All right. But an earnest request is, "Dad, all of my happiness and joy rides on whether or not you purchase that toy right now, don't sentence me to a life of despair, please." That's earnest. And as parents, it strikes you differently, right? You at least think about it, a half a second longer. Earnest request. He's praying earnestly. In other words, his heart is inclined, it's moved. He's pleading with the Lord. He's praying earnestly. He's begging God to be with them.

Now, one of the things that's so instructive about this passage is that not only does he tell us he's praying earnestly, but he tells us what he's praying. These little prayers that Paul puts in the letters are so instructive, because it teaches us how we should pray for one another. Verse 11 through 13, he says in 11, "Now may our God and father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you." So first, he prays that he would be able to see them again. He's told them he's longing to come to them, but Satan has been hindering him. And so he's praying, "God, would you direct my way back to them." He wants them to know that he's asking God that he might come back to them.

But then in verse 12, he says this, "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another, and for all, as we do for you. So that he may establish your hearts, blameless and holiness before our God and father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." So he's praying, there's a lot of words, but he's really essentially praying for two things. He's praying for their love and their holiness. He wants them to increase and abound in love and he wants the Lord to do that in them. And he wants them to be established blameless in holiness, establish their hearts, blameless in holiness. That's what he is longing for. He's wanting their holiness and their love.

And prays that they would love one another and that they would love others. Now, why would he pray that God would increase their love? So many of us think of love as this involuntary thing, like it's a reaction. And we think, I can't help who I love or how much I love, it's something that I do involuntarily, but that's not true. Love, as the Bible talks about it is an act of the will, I choose to love and I can grow in love. It is true that some people are to love than others. And it's even true that the same person can be easier to love in one moment than they are the next. But God commands us to love him and to love our neighbors. In fact, these are the two greatest commandments that you would love the Lord your God, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and that we would love your neighbor as yourself. God commands us to love.

So how can he do that? How can we grow and abound in love? Well, remember that the Bible says that God

can steer the heart like a channel of water. So when our hearts are not loving, when they are cold or distant and they're moving away from God or away from people, God can bend and change and form our hearts into a more loving heart. He can incline us toward people instead of away from them. In fact, one of my most frequent prayers for myself, for my family and for you, the church at Providence is that God would help us to love each other. And that God would help us to love him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. I pray this all the time because I know my own heart. I know that I am not bent towards these things. And I need God to bend me towards loving my family sacrificially towards loving you the church sacrificially and towards loving him with my whole heart, all my soul, all my strength. I need his help to do that. And he can do it.

That's why Paul is praying for it here. He prays that their love would've bound. And second, he prays that God would establish their heart's blameless in holiness before God. Now, when the Bible talks about holiness and it's using that as a description of God, it's talking about how God is transcendent, he's other. He is different. He's he's set apart. He's blameless in every way. John talks about how he is holy and that he's blameless. And he says that, "In him is light and there's no darkness at all." And so when the Bible's calling us to be holy, what it is calling us to, is God likeness, to be like God.

Here it's talking about being established blameless in holiness. In other words, pursuing this sort of moral aspect of holiness and purity that we would fight sin and put it to death. And we pursue holy behavior to be near God. The Bible is clear that we won't achieve perfect holiness in this life, but it is also clear that we should be pursuing it.

I wonder if sometimes we give up too easily in our pursuit of holiness because we know we can't be perfect. And church family, let me encourage all of us this morning to run hard after holiness. Run hard to be set apart for the things of God and like Paul, pray for each other as you pursue it. The Bible says that God has made known to us the path of life, moving away from sin and moving towards God brings rich blessing, pursue it, put sin to death.

We should pray for one another. People of the kingdom pray earnestly for one another. Pray that God would help you to love others in the church. Pray for one another, that your love would increase and abound. Find someone to commit, to pray for your holiness. Parents, pray for your children, that they would be established blameless in holiness. Pray that God would help you in your own pursuit of holiness. Pray for one another. The driving idea, I think of this section of Thessalonians is that the community among the people of the kingdom is different. And when we think about how he's described our lives being bound up together and the sort of intimacy that we share with one another, the relationships that we share are supposed to be different. And I think the main application, if we could boil that down to one thing, what is it that you should do? Is that as people of the kingdom, we should dive into community, in ways that are different than the world around us.

The world pursues community for what they can get out of it. And the world is always measuring community. And there's always this risk/reward sort of calculation that's going on? What can I get out of this relationship? Well, that's how much I'm willing to risk. But the gospel turns all of that on its head. And it says, "Listen, Jesus came to you, gave himself away completely so that you could give yourselves away to one another." There's no calculation of risk. There's only the promise of God that he will be with you. He will carry you through. And he's given you all you need for life and godliness.

The world isolates because it's safer. But we look to intertwine our hearts and lives for the joy and wellbeing of one another. All of this built on the realities of the gospel that Jesus came to pursue us and gave himself away. The gospel gives us a blueprint for pursuing this kind of community. We give ourselves away and entrust ourselves to God. And we do this by faith, knowing that he is good and it gives us the tools that we need to maintain it. It teaches us about self-sacrifice. It allows us to forgive each other because we've been forgiven. It allows us to confess our mistakes and seek forgiveness, because we've already confessed that we aren't perfect. If you think about a biblical theology of relationships, that God's big story in the Bible is creation, fall, redemption, restoration. Okay, think about the relationships through that sort of paradigm, that you have creation, you have what God created relationships to be in Genesis chapters one and two. That Adam and Eve were together and says they were naked and without shame. In other words, they were perfectly vulnerable with each other. They were completely trusting because no one had ever sinned against anyone else. They had never been lied to. They trusted one another completely. That's what God created relationships to be like, that there would be this perfect trust and this loving vulnerability that we would care for one another.

And then there was the fall, and our sin entered the world and our relationships were distorted and broken. Why? Because we started to manipulate, started to fight for our own interests, started to put ourselves above other people. And our relationships were broken and marred and they still are.

And then Jesus entered the world and it says that he came to make all things new, including our relationships. And he came to bring restoration to those relationships and he gave all the tools that were necessary to restore what had been broken. He restored our relationship with God, and then he gave us these tools to restore our relationships with another, that we'd be forgiving, that we would put the needs of others ahead of ourselves, that we would walk in humility together.

And then finally there will be restoration. That Revelation 21 and 22 Jesus says, "There'll be no more crying, nor pain or tears anymore. But these former things will pass away." In other words, these relationships that are beginning to mend now with the fruit of the gospel, they'll be completely healed.

Diving into community can be a scary thing. If you've been around long enough on this world, you've experienced the pain that comes from being too close to people. At times I've been the one that was sinned against, and it felt the pain that came from it. And I've also been the one that sinned and caused pain in someone

else's life. This is an inevitable reality for us. And yet we're still called to love one another. John 13, "Just as I have loved you, you also ought to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

So I've been thinking all week about, what do we need to hear this morning that will help us to embrace the promises of God and dive into community, even though it's not safe, even though we know it's going to come with some challenges. How do we embrace that? How can we trust God to just dive into that? I was thinking about it yesterday while I was doing my yard work. It's a normal thing for me. I do some of my best sermon preparation while I'm working in the yard outside. And so if you see me working in the yard on a Saturday and I'm preaching the next day, don't talk to me unless you want to be in the sermon.

So I was out there, coming around the side of the house and I'm just mulling this over. I'm thinking, "What do we need to hear? What is it about the character of God that's going to invite us into this and give us the confidence that we need to jump into it." And I passed these bushes on the side of my house. It was like a lightning bolt from heaven, but in these bushes right now, I've got this bird nest and it's got two baby bird eggs in it, it's got two eggs in it.

I discovered this nest last week, I was doing some yard work. I was trimming up these bushes and these two birds are going crazy around me. In fact, I had some headphones and they were so loud that I heard them over what was going on in the headphones. And so I started looking around, what is going on. These birds are panicking.

And so I put myself in the bird's shoes and I start to really feel bad for these birds, because imagine if you've got this little house, these two little babies in there and there's this big giant just looming around your house. You assume he wants to eat the eggs. That's what everything else is trying to do. And so they're panicking and I'm feeling bad for them. And I find myself wanting as crazy as it sounds to be able to explain to them, "Hey, I don't mean any harm to the eggs. In fact, instead of panicking, you should be relieved that I'm here. You should be like, I'm going to protect you. If I see something trying to mess with the eggs, you have my word, I'm going to help." But I couldn't explain that to them. They'll never know my heart for the eggs. They can't. And as I was thinking about that, I went by the nest again and they start to panic and I was thinking, "These poor birds." But it struck me that one of the beautiful things about the way God has made us is he made us where we could understand his heart for us. He designed us in such a way that he could tell us how he feels about us. And he writes it in his word over and over again. "I will be there for you. I am in ever present help in times of trouble."

And not only did he tell us over and over again, but then he showed us in the gospel. Like Paul says, "If he gave his only son, what will he not give?" In other words, he's proven that he's willing to pay any price to redeem us. He's shown us his heart for us. And he says that he will give us all we need for life and godliness.

And so the encouragement is that we know the heart of God, which encourages us to jump into these relationships. Why? Because he's going to give us everything that we need. He will walk with us. He will help. There will be pain. We will need him, but it will be worth it. He will give us all we need for life and godliness. All that we need to walk humbly together so that we can enjoy the relationships that he created us to enjoy. If you're not a Christian here this morning, then I would plead with you, put your trust in Jesus Christ. He came to live the life that you could not live. He died the death that you deserved to die. God raised him from the dead so that we could put our trust in him. And when we do, our sin is removed from us and his righteousness is given to us so that we can be in right relationship with our father.

If you are a Christian here this morning, and my encouragement to you is to trust God and to dive into relationships, open yourself up to the people around you and trust yourself to him, trusting that he is going to give you everything that you need to walk with them.

I don't know what that looks like for you this morning. I don't know what step it is you need to take, if you need to join this church, or if you need to find a life group or you need to be in that life group and actually open yourself up to people in the group, whatever it is, I encourage you to move forward by faith, trusting God, because he is good, trusting his design for us, that joy and intimacy is possible among the people of God, because of what he has done for us in the gospel.

Let's pray together now and let's ask God for his help. "Heavenly father, would you help us now as we think about pursuing community, and we think about the risk that's involved, the fears that can stir up in us. God, would you help us, give us faith to believe that you are good, that you are for us, that you are with us and that you will give us all that we need for life and godliness.

I pray for those who are here considering the claims of Jesus Christ, that he came to live the life that they could not live and die in their place. God, I pray that you would give them faith to cast themselves upon his work and trust themselves to him, that they might find forgiveness. How would you stir our hearts, give us faith, help us to believe. We pray Jesus' name. Amen."



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