

15th Sunday after Trinity 2024

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[0 : 0 0] We have been this summer in the third book of the Psalter. Now we return to our series in Acts. Now the last time we were in Acts was, I think in the spring.

It's been some time. We wrapped up in Acts chapter 10. We're going to continue on in Acts chapter 11. Going forward, we'll have a number of these for you. If you remember them, or maybe you still have them at home, these are the Acts Scripture Journals.

They're our gift to you. We'll have a big stack of them at the back. But really, they're just simple ways to follow along. Chapter and verse on the left, lines on the right. So I'll be following along with this.

And next week, I encourage you to follow along as well. Brotherly love is a mark of Christianity. It has been from the very beginning.

It is, in fact, the very thing that has always marked God's people, the community of God's people. It's brotherly love, brotherly affection.

[1 : 0 1] Care for one another. We read in the summary of the law, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second commandment, like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.

It is the hallmark of both testaments. So to be a member in the Church of Christ is to belong to a family where God is our Father, Christ is our big brother, and then we have siblings, so to speak, in the faith with one another.

This is what it means to be a child of God, all of which, of course, we are animated by the Holy Spirit. Three gods, or three persons, one God.

Consider some of these verses. I read already Leviticus 19, 18. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. John 13, 34-35. This is from Christ himself. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

[2 : 0 9] You also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. And then the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 12 says this in verse 9.

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. This is the thing that knits us together more than hobbies, more than certain affinities we may have.

It unites us more than our socioeconomic status, even our ethnicity and culture. By the way, it's fantastic to find connections through all of those things.

But to be a part of God's family is to be marked by the love of God and the love of each other, regardless of those things. As we go back into Acts chapter 11, we will return to Cornelius' house.

In fact, we'll return to the story of Cornelius. And if you remember back, I think it was in February or March, when we were last in Acts chapter 10. But if not, a bit of a reminder.

[3 : 23] The Apostle Peter is in Joppa. He is in some kind of dream state. And he sees this sheet that is descending.

And upon it are all sorts of unclean animals. And this voice from heaven says, rise up, kill and eat. Peter, the good, pious, law-keeping Jewish man says, not a chance.

I've never touched any of this my whole life. The vision happens three times. And then he realizes this isn't so much about food, but this is about unbelievers, Gentiles, non-Jewish people.

And then the story goes, messengers, as he woke up, messengers met him. And he went with them north some miles to Cornelius' house.

Cornelius being a non-Jewish God-fearer who comes to faith, him and his household. And now Peter is back in Jerusalem. And he is giving this report to the church.

[4 : 22] And the church, you'd think, are fist-pumping, they're excited. But we see something quite different. Brotherly affection needs to mark the church.

And it sounds great until you realize how dang hard it is, how difficult it is to love one another in the way that Christ commands. In fact, we are hardwired in many respects to not show brotherly affection, or at least not brotherly affection far and wide, but very, like I said, in those hobby groups or the affinity groups, or with people of just our ethnicity, or people of just our culture, or people of just our means.

It doesn't come easy. We are people that do not build bridges of connection. We like to fortify our lives around the walls where people can't really get in. It's safety.

But to love like our big brother Christ means to sacrifice like him. Therefore, brotherly affection, it requires the following. It requires a sacrifice of status.

It requires a sacrifice of time, and finally, a sacrifice of resources. We could spend a few weeks in chapter 11. There is a lot to glean from, but in putting this together, this theme of brotherly affection and the obstacles to that came out.

[5 : 51] So that's what we're going to jump into this morning. So if you have a Bible, follow with me, chapter 11 of Acts, starting in verse 1. We'll read shortly. But before we get into that, we'll look into the sacrifice of status.

So what does it mean, what do I mean when I say the sacrifice of status needs to be a hallmark of brotherly affection?

The Jewish people, they somehow endured, if you know your Old Testament, if you know your biblical history, somehow endured through countless, it seems, falling away from God, being given over to their enemies, exiled, being foreigners in a foreign land, having huge, huge portions of the population killed or carted off.

And what ends up happening by the time Jesus comes about is that the Jewish people have become really cagey around Gentiles.

Israel, at the time, is ruled by Rome. Before that, they had some autonomy. Before that, they were, they had the might of Greece upon them.

[7 : 15] They don't like foreign powers. They're not big fans of Gentiles. They're cagey, to say the least. And what ends up happening through that is that being God's people becomes synonymous with being a Jew.

This is in the first century. This isn't what the Bible is talking about. So, what ends up happening is that if you want to be a worshiper of the one true God, you have to convert to become a Jew.

It's not the case in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, there's many instances where people outside of the people of Israel come to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through faith.

It was always God's plan. In fact, the whole purpose of having this chosen people is to be a light to the nations so that they see that there is one true God so that they may come in.

If you, if you remember the prophecy of Isaiah, Isaiah 56, Jesus quotes it that that the temple of God, the house of God, is supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations.

[8 : 23] Interestingly, Gentile is the word for nations. Not so in the first century. So what ends up happening is Jesus dies, he rises again, he meets with the disciples, he is with them for weeks, and before he ascends, he says to them, listen, you're going to be my witnesses to Judea, to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and what does he say at the end?

To the ends of the earth. They hear him. They have their marching orders, except that they are, they are people of their time. They are first century Jews. First century Jews are cagey around Gentiles.

So, we have a whole family of Gentiles that comes to faith. And Peter is excited. He has had visions, he has seen the Holy Spirit fall upon them, and now he is going to report back to the church.

And now we'll jump in to verse 1 of Acts chapter 11. Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles, that is Cornelius and his family, also had received the word of God.

So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party, that is just to say that Jewish Christians, the circumcision party, criticized him, criticized him, saying, you went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.

[9 : 47] You went to people that were unclean to the Gentiles. I'll pause there quickly. Like I said before, it is not a bad thing to find affinity with people that share the same culture and language and ethnicity and likes and hobbies, even people that have the same kind of work situation as you.

It's not a bad thing. But it certainly is a problem when it's at the exclusion of connecting and loving and being with people that are different than you.

The exclusion of others on purpose is a problem to keep people at arm's length who we do not aspire to be like or people who we fear would hamper our ambitions.

It's a problem. Like I said, we're fantastic at building fortifications around us rather than bridges towards others. But just in case we decide that reverting such a bad posture of our heart is easily done, let's just pause for a second and take in how the leaders of the Church of Christ reacted when people came to faith.

Verses 1 to 3. They said, what on earth are you doing associating with them? You see, to overcome the tribalism, to overcome the prejudice, to overcome that those people are ick, it's not just a behavior modification.

[11 : 26] It's not just a, I'm going to take some classes and maybe work through some of my own prejudice all fine. Not saying it's bad. Not saying it's bad at all. Fine things. But you see, that assumes that the behavior is only skin deep.

It's only just beneath the surface when the reality is, is that this prejudice runs really all the way to the core of who we are. Again, remember, the Church has got explicit marching orders from Jesus.

And not only that, these are some of the disciples that walked with Him so that they would remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. They would remember about the Syrophenician woman.

They would remember instances where non-Jewish people came to faith and how Jesus welcomed them into the kingdom as a foretaste of what was to come. And yet, they still had this very, very raw reaction, this ungodly reaction.

So how does God respond? How does He respond to their heart? They want to maintain their status as the unclean, circumcised people of God not connected to those Gentiles.

- [12 : 44] How does God deal with this problem? And simply put, it's with kindness and mercy and love. God provides not a chastisement but proof to the Jewish Christian leadership in Jerusalem that the church, it's not something that they can take or leave with Gentiles coming in but it is a non-optional reality and in fact it will be something that will mark the church.

Every tribe, language, and tongue will bow a knee to Christ. In his commentary on Acts, John Stott, who was an Anglican in England, a fantastic commentator, he described four instances of God's merciful provision of proof that the Gentile conversion was legitimate.

Verses 4 to 10, I'm just going to totally just take it for myself here. Verses 4 to 10, he talks about, John Stott is, he talks about the divine vision of the sheep given three times as proof to Peter.

Again, not once, three times, thick skulls, right? It takes, it takes, you know, maybe that's a hallucination the first time, the second time, man, I must have been dreaming, the third time, it seeps in.

Three times he was given this vision in this dream-like state where God spelled it out to him. Let no man call unclean what God has, is what God, or what is it?

- [14 : 22] Let nobody call unclean what God calls holy. He's talking about his people. The second thing, verses 11 to 12, the divine command to follow the messengers who arrived at the very moment the vision sunk in with Peter.

The timing was impeccable. Again, if you have time afterwards or remember back in March or whenever we were reading through it in Acts 10, Peter wakes up from the vision and this group of people have made the hours and hours and hours long journey arriving at the same time.

No coincidence. Impeccable divine timing. The third, verses 13 to 14, the divine message that Cornelius received from the angel was preparing him to hear the message of salvation.

It's not just that Peter had a vision. He went up to Cornelius' house proclaimed what was happening and Cornelius considered it fantastic but no, God was already at work.

This is a part of the story. And then finally, verses 15 and 16, the divine action of God himself that confirmed the entire thing as Peter was proclaiming the gospel, the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his whole household and then all of a sudden we see with the Gentiles what happened with the Jews in Acts chapter 2.

- [15 : 47] The exact same way. The section even says that verse 17 and onward it says this. This is Peter talking at the end of his recounting of everything that happened.

If then God gave the same gift to them that is Cornelius the Gentiles as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ who was I that I could stand in God's way?

Verse 18 When they that is the church in Jerusalem the leadership when they heard these things they fell silent and they glorified God saying then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.

The Gentiles came to faith. No more Jewish supremacy or at least Jewish caginess towards the Gentiles. And legitimate repercussions of this almost certainly if they were to embrace this is the Jewish church to embrace the Gentiles that would put them at odds with their own people.

They had to suspend their desire to maintain their status within their community in order to show brotherly love and affection and to welcome in these Gentiles into the one true church of God.

[17:16] So brotherly affection does not put status above love. It must include the breakdown of prejudice and suspicion based on ethnicity and language and background and all sorts of other socioeconomic things and everything that will divide it needs to be shelved.

It recognizes that all flesh needs redemption and therefore all earthly status. However good is only temporary and not eternal. So the Apostle Paul when he's actually addressing the Apostle Peter's relapse into this thinking if you will see farther down and eventually if we get into Galatians we'll see this that Peter who is this championing of Cornelius and the Gentiles coming into faith he relapses into this idea of they're unclean I'm clean and Paul addressing it in Galatians chapter 3 says this for as many as you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ there is neither Jew or Greek there is neither slave or free there is neither male or female for you are all one in Christ Jesus and if you are Christ then you are Abraham's offspring heirs according to the promise which isn't to say that there are no distinctions amongst us is that the distinctions do not serve any purpose anymore in terms of your worth image bearers saved by

Christ baptized into him putting him on therefore it is Christ who defines us from here on out but that can't happen we can't show that kind of brotherly love and affection to one another if we are trying to maintain some kind of status as the Lord provided divine proof for the legitimacy of Gentile inclusion the church was now positioned and willing to show brotherly affection not just to Cornelius and his household but to any Gentile that would come to faith and that's exactly what we see in the next section this is the section that Margaret read Acts 11 19 to 26 and this leads us into the second portion so we looked at the sacrifice of status but now the sacrifice of time Acts chapter 8 again if you want to kind of go back and read it Stephen is the first martyr and a part of his martyrdom part of that martyrdom story was that the church they fled a bit of a side note but it would seem that it's totally okay at times to not stand and be martyred but there is a place for fleeing martyrdom in this case it led to the proclamation of the gospel well well well well well past the boundaries of Judea and Samaria we'll read in actually I'll skip over that part but basically the gospel then goes because the people scatter the gospel also scatters to Lebanon what is modern day

Lebanon that's Phoenicia Cyprus and to Antioch Antioch being the third largest city in the Roman Empire at the time the capital of the Syrian state so the church now knowing that God's will for his church is to include the Gentiles hear of what has been happening in Antioch and what they do is fantastic for they send their best and brightest to nurture and to fan and to flame that faith if you look with me verses 21 to 24 we read about Barnabas and the hand of the Lord was with them and the great number who believed turned to the Lord the report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem remember the same ears that heard about Cornelius and called him unclean and they sent Barnabas to Antioch when he came and saw the grace that is Barnabas when he came to

Antioch and saw the grace of God he was glad and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose for he was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith and a great many people were added to the Lord Barnabas the son of encouragement goes to Antioch not to heap upon this young church demands but to encourage them to remain faithful to the message and call of the gospel another side note this and other instances would suggest that the biblical model of the church of church governance is not highly independent local churches but that there is one church connected to different bodies our expression is with a bishop that is an overseer over a number of different churches but the point is and it works out in other polities as well but the point is there's no individual churches left on their own to fend for themselves in this case the church in

[22 : 42] Jerusalem HQ hears about it they want to help and that's exactly what they do they send their best and their brightest Barnabas to do just that and Barnabas doesn't show up give them a manual say hey listen 10% tithe on the first of every month at this bank account shekels please okay figure it out no no no he stays there for a full year in fact it's even longer because he was there for a certain period of time he leaves because he sees that the need is actually greater than that he can meet himself he gets Saul who is also the apostle Paul they travel to Antioch and they stay there for a year they teach they guide they encourage the church in Jerusalem is without one of their chief encouragers a pillar in the church and it kind of it helps us to see that if we are to show brotherly love and affection it's going to cost us time it means saying no to things that we enjoy for the benefit and the sake of others our status isn't just the only thing that is sacrifice but our time as well and as we get older time is a precious and finite commodity

I just browsed through this article this week the BBC really long might be worth reading it but they asked the question why does time seem to go slower for children and not adults there's like a whole series of scientific studies that they do a survey on but as we get older we see that time is finite and it zips by way too fast ten weeks of the summer gone gone this is September 9th September 8th it's gone it's going to be Christmas around the corner time is precious and yet we are called to sacrifice it for the love and benefit of those around us what more precious thing can we offer than time it's never a waste of time to be an instrument of God to help a brother or sister in need here Barnabas he is recognizing the grace of God at work in the church and that the Lord desires him to participate in that encouragement

I guess the question for us is where we recognize the grace of God at work or at least God's desire to use us as his chosen instrument in a specific situation are we willing to say yes to it here's the tough bit the sacrifice gets even harder when you are giving of your time and it's not appreciated or when the gains that are made are lost or at least they seem to be lost a progression in terms of people growing in the faith seldom is like this it's more like this and sometimes it's like way down here and sometimes it continues to go sky high and then goes down again but the point is if you're walking with somebody if you're helping them out there's times where you feel like you are wasting your time I'm tired of this Christine and

I have very dear friends they're lifelong missionaries in France they've been there for some 40 years they planted three churches and they're godly people I think the biggest church they've ever had is like 50 people France is a tough place David he has gone through bouts of depression being on the mission field and he tells a story about how he was in a low spot ministry fruit of ministry was not happening people were coming to faith but then leaving the church he was super discouraged and he says to one of his daughters he says I'm sick of wasting my life for French people and then his daughter says something remarkable she goes dad you're going to waste your life on something it might as well be for the French but like not as a joke but like it kind of brings tears to your eyes because the economy of God is not like our economy right it's not in productivity minutes it's seeing the hand of God at work which we can't see in its totality but he can from the beginning to the end and he knows which direction it's going in and in the end he delights in us showing brotherly affection and love to those when we sacrifice our time it's not a waste love for each other animated by our love for the

Lord Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit it has to fuel our service in the times especially when we give up our time because we will become hardened and cynical but I'm telling you that this brotherly affection this time spent is what the world is desperate for what we are desperate for if you poke around the internet for not very long you'll see there's this whole kind of like niche maybe not so niche anymore but this big kind of subsection of the internet of young men especially searching for meaning searching for connection searching for purpose and we are commanded not optional we are commanded to love in a brotherly way to give up of our status and of our time to waste our lives on people we give up our status we give up our time the last bit we give up our resources this is the final section verses 27 to 30 let me read it here now in these days prophets came down from

[29 : 09] Jerusalem to Antioch and one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world this took place in the days of Claudius so the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea and they did so sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul we're not going to do a deep dive into this section we're not really even going to talk about Agabus at all apart from me just saying we're not going to talk about Agabus at all but with time brotherly love requires our riches and our resources it's an improper thing to try to buy affection through gifts but authentic love will always cost something it will always cost something if you say you love somebody but you withhold generosity it communicates that at best your love is very weak and shallow at worst you don't love when you love somebody you are generous or you attempt generosity it's the same with brotherly affection amongst each other so remember the widow's offering in

Luke 21 her affections are turned towards the Lord she loves God she gives to coins it's nothing but to Christ he says she has given much more than everybody else because our sacrificial giving of our resources and riches according to our ability this is what it says here according to their ability it's instructive to where our allegiances and affections lie what's interesting is that Christ talks about money often it is something that seems to be always on his lips in his teaching and it's connected to the things that we really love we invest in things we want to see grow and the things and people that bring us enjoyment we invest in those things it's no problem for us to spend money on things that we enjoy the command here is to spend money on people because they are enjoyed by God to help and receive help in monetary ways are essential in the exercise of brotherly love if you remember last week's gospel reading it was a it was a story of the good Samaritan the parable of the good

Samaritan famous the world over why because it's radical generosity not out of compulsion but because of love we see where the Samaritan's heart is in that story this is what brotherly love ought to look like so love one another give to one another give of your time but also give of your resources give to the church give to missions give to mercy ministries give to those who you know need aid give generously according to your ability but also I would say be ready to receive it is it's far better to give than to receive but it's also far easier to give than to receive or maybe not I think maybe for the majority of us because to receive feels like charity and I don't want to be the object of charity learn to receive as well another point and then we'll move on to the conclusion is just this who is giving this gift to of charity to the church in Jerusalem it's the church of Antioch what's remarkable of about this little tiny you know four verses is that the church in Antioch comes to faith and then their faith is proven true by their actions and love towards God and then by extension how they love one another that they love the church in Jerusalem and they send aid because there is an issue and a problem maybe the church in

Jerusalem had to swallow the pride we should be the ones who are exporting goods and services and the gospel message out but they are also recipients we do not want to be in anyone's pocket or feel as though we are the object of someone's charity yet this is the way brotherly affection is we give of our resources but we also receive of the other resources because everything that we have ultimately is given to us to steward by God you have a job because God gave you the mind to think and to formulate and to to in breath in your lungs to wake up in the morning the strength to endure day in and day out in many ways you have earned your paycheck but it is not from just you as we wrap things up I want to bring two points to our attention the first one is the biggest one in all the examples of brotherly affection in Acts chapter 11 that we have seen all of them have the same principle and it is this that as we show brotherly affection we emulate an image and proclaim the risen

Lord Jesus Christ what do I mean Christ laid down all his heavenly status to associate with us he sacrificed the status of heaven he descended he condescended to us perfect undefiled clean the only one who is that and yet what does he do he sacrifices such status in heaven so that he will die for the unclean he dies for the defiled for the broken the sinful and in him we are granted repentance that leads to life and the Holy Spirit our comforter and guide is given to us this is because Christ sacrifices his status so as we love in such a way we proclaim what Christ has done also Christ gives up three years of his earthly ministry only to hang on a Roman crucifix alone he wastes his time it would seem on the disciples he wastes his life for the sake of others but it was never a waste he redeemed us from the depths of our sin and brokenness but you know what he also does he redeems time itself history no longer is spiraling into a death spiral but rather history finds its culmination in the renewal and restoration of all things for eternity that even time is restored in Christ when we give up our time we are not wasting it if we do it in his name for the sake of others finally Christ becomes poor giving up of his resources so that in him we may become rich he gives us what money cannot buy what money cannot buy it does not matter how much money you give to charity if you think that that giving is going to somehow absolve you from your sin it is only

[36 : 52] Christ who can do such a thing gives up his self to us the biggest charity case of all so that we can have true food true drink and so that we will never hunger and thirst again and all of this again is animated by love he is our older brother he has made us children of the father and as we love in such a brotherly way we are proclaiming the gospel of Christ if we are doing it in his name the second point is this and this is an interesting bit and I wrestled with this because you know I didn't do a deep exposition of chapter 11 and that's what we've committed to in the church I mean we read through most of it and we touched on some points but really it wasn't like an exposition of the text but here's the thing the church has changed if you've been here for more than a year the church has changed not just because we're in a new building for the third time but because people have joined us and with people joining us it's fantastic to see these new faces it provides us an opportunity to get to know people and to love people but it also runs the risk of us becoming cliquey or just to hang out and connect with those that we're comfortable with but let us strive by

God's strength to love one another with this kind of sacrificial brotherly love that we are patient and grace filled in our dealings with one another as we grow in our love for one another we do so in the power of Christ and again we image Christ and proclaim him this is the better way but it runs the risk of getting hurt it runs the risk of putting yourself out there and being vulnerable for it not to be reciprocated or for you to potentially get stomped on God forbid but this is the nature of what it is to extend yourself out in love but it's worth it I'll end with this quote and hopefully it's inspiring and it spurs us on it's from the four loves by C.S.

Lewis and he's talking about the vulnerability of love and this is what he says to love at all is to be vulnerable love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken if you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one not even an animal wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries avoid all entanglements lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness but in that casket safe dark motionless airless it will change it will not be broken it will become unbreakable impenetrable irredeemable to love is to be vulnerable friends as we grow in community and love and seek to show brotherly affection to one another for the glory of Christ do so with his strength and take a chance and when we falter and fail because we will we go to the source of our strength who is

Christ our redeemer brother and friend let us pray father in heaven we thank you for the sweet opportunity it is to to call you our father because of Christ our brother because of the power of the Holy Spirit lord what a privilege it is also to to call each other brothers and sisters in the faith and lord we pray that that we would be so so brave and bold as to love with real godly christ like brotherly affection lord protect us from hurt but lord help us to not erect castles around our hearts or put our hearts in coffins as c.s.

lewis says lord let this congregation be marked by love so that we will proclaim your goodness to a very love starved city that we live in this city of ottawa we pray this in christ's name amen amen