

"ON GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS"

INTRODUCTION

At the end of his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul mentions two women by name - Euodia and Syntyche. The names are not familiar to us. There isn't any one in our congregation today who has a name like either one of those two names. Euodia and Syntyche lived in Macedonia under Greek influence, and we would probably do better to think of them as Grace and Ethel - two real women living real lives in a world unlike ours outwardly, but not greatly different inwardly.

DEVELOPMENT

The interesting thing is that he mentioned them, not to greet them, as he often did at the end of his letters, not to compliment them or to congratulate them, but rather to urge them to make up their differences! In modern English what he wrote was, "I beg you by name to make up your differences as Christians should". He doesn't spell out what the differences were. They were not religious differences; we know that because they were both Christians, and both had worked closely with Paul in that small, newborn Christian community of Philippi.

I wonder what it was that caused the rift between these two women - Euodia and Syntyche. They may have fallen in love with the same man, and therefore disliked each other. One may have been jealous of the other's good looks. Or, perhaps one thought that Paul was paying more attention to the other than he did to her. One may have been better off than the other and unconsciously patronized her and thereby infuriated her. Or, they may have simply disliked each other and for no good reason. We do not know what brought about the differences between them. All we know is that they had serious differences, and that Paul assumed as Christians they should and could make them up. We know too that he had the courage to mention them by name, which few Christians ministers today would ever dream of doing from the pulpit of a Church.

WE HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE WITH EACH OTHER

This personal reference reminds us that we, you and I, have to learn how to live with each other. With the people we love - this undoubtedly is the easiest. We have to learn to live with those we love and care for in patience and in understanding, to live with them without spoiling them, without possessing them....leaving them free to live their own lives, think their own thoughts, have their own opinions. And then we have to learn the more difficult thing - to live with the people we do not like and who do not like us - the people who do not think the way we think, or look the way we look, who do not have the same ideas and thoughts that we may have about religion, or politics, or morals, or anything else. We have to learn to live with them, and this is difficult. It's much more difficult than learning how to live in outer space. It's more difficult because it is less predictable. You never know how people are going to behave, or how you are going to respond.

There is not much use in learning how to live in outer space if we have not learned the lesson of getting along with each other down here on earth. There is not much use in learning how to operate

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an IBM computer if we have not learned how our neighbor operates, or how we ourselves operate.

Learning to live with each other - this is the theme of today's sermon, and it's the most important lesson that we have to consider at this time.

LIVE WITH OURSELVES

One thing that we know about this matter of getting along with others is that we shall never be able to do it effectively until we have learned to live with the one person that we live with twenty four hours a day every day of the year - namely, ourselves. You cannot live with other people - that is, live with them harmoniously, creatively, happily, - if you are at odds with yourself.....until you know yourself, see yourself, and that can be hard to do.

How well do you know yourself? Are you an easy person to live with? Some of you I think I know well enough to know that by nature and temperament you are easy to live with and easy to get along with, but there aren't a great many like that. And most of the people who are easy to live with and get along with have gone through some fairly stiff self-discipline. They have learned to discipline their emotions, their energies, their tongues, their time.

Are you an easy person to live with. When people think of you, do they think instantly of one of those bull dozers or pile drivers that you occasionally see around the city where some of these new apartment houses are being built - a pile driver, driving the piles into the ground - a powerfully determined person, driving other people into the position where you want them? Is that what they think of when they think of you? If they do, you ought to know it because pile drivers may be necessary in the construction of modern buildings, but they are not necessary in human relations.

If your temper flares up, do you know it? - and do you know why it does? If you're self centered, inclined to draw everything to yourself, do you know it, and if you know it, do you know why you are that way. If you are extremely sensitive, if you're prickly, do you know it, and do you know why? If you feel resentment and hostility, do you know it. Have you any idea why you are driven by those wayward desires.

We take for granted that none of us are perfect, that every human being has certain strengths and certain weaknesses. The point is to know, of course, yourself so well that you know where you weaknesses may exist and to do something about them. This can be difficult for some people, and some may need outside help doing this. But it's not impossible....even for ordinary people like ourselves. We don't all need psychiatrists to teach us how to understand ourselves, and how to live effectively with each other.

PAUL HAD A WAY

We find that Paul, the Apostle, had a unique way of approaching this matter, a way that is worth our consideration. As he studied the life of Jesus of Nazareth, he came to see himself and to understand himself a great

deal better. From what we know about Paul, he was greatly obsessed with his sins and weaknesses. This was prior to his conversion experience. He was so obsessed with them he could never think of anything else. He had never stopped to consider his strengths - until he saw himself in Christ's way of life. In Christ, he saw his strengths, his potentialities, his opportunities, his mission. It made a difference. It was the turning point of his life. You say to yourself, well I'm not Paul. I can't be expected to be like him or to do the things he did. However, up to a point you can do it. Let me try to suggest how you can begin.

You listen to Jesus tell the story of the Good Samaritan. Where are you in that story? With the priest...or the Levite who passed by on the other side...or with the Good Samaritan...or the inn keeper...or the man who was robbed. Where are you in that story?

Jesus spoke about the pure in heart seeing God. What is your heart like? In other words, what are your motives like? Are they all mixed up...conflicting...going in opposite directions...what about your values? Jesus said something about seeking first the kingdom of God. What are you seeking? Status...money...fame... What are your goals in life?

When Jesus encouraged his followers to set aside time for prayer, where are you? Off doing things that seem more important? When he forgave his enemies, where are you? When he calls us to "love another" and to outdo one another in doing goodness and showing kindness, where are you?

It is one thing to see yourself, and perhaps these questions help us to see ourselves a bit better. However, it is another thing to accept what you see and you can never live with yourself until you accept yourself as you are. This means accepting the way you look, the age you are, the situation in life in which you find yourself. It means accepting your limitations. This is even more difficult than to see yourself, because somehow or other so often most of us when we see ourselves exposed, don't always like what we see. And so we do all sorts of things to cover it up and hide it, and unconsciously we try to be someone we are not.

Getting back to our theme: on getting along with others. In order to do this, we must first get along with ourselves and this involves seeing ourselves for what we are and an acceptance of it. Then we begin to move out to others and somehow there is far less strain and tension in our relationships with others. Only the person who is able to accept himself can live easily with others.

LIVE WITH GOD

There is another truth that needs to be considered in connection with this lesson and that is this: we will never be able to live either with ourselves or with other people until we learn to live with God. Some of you are saying, now what on earth do you mean by that? Be more specific. I shall try to put what I mean in terms of real situations.

Several weeks ago I found myself talking to a person who had done something wrong, something quite wrong. He admitted that he

had done it and he admitted that it was wrong. But then he asked, "What difference does it make?" I thought for a moment or two, and then looking at him, I said, "Do you know anything about chemistry?" He replied, "Not much". "Neither do I" I said to him, "But, as one amateur to another, I raise this question: what difference would it make if you were to mix three parts of hydrogen with one of oxygen?" "None", he said, "except that you wouldn't have water".

"You ask what difference does the wrong you have done make? None - except that you don't get a real man, living a real life, in a real world, with a real God - rising to his fullest potentialities as a child of God". "That's the difference it makes". And I went so far as to repeat my warning and I do not use many imperatives, you know - and said:

"You have to learn to live with God.....with the moral laws of the universe, just as surely as the chemist has to live with H₂O, and not H₃O"

CLOSING Learning to live with other people. I wonder if the two women that Paul mentions in his letter to the Philippians ever made up their differences and learned how to get along with each other. I should like to think that they did.

Human relationships and friendships are among the treasures of life. We can not afford to allow any of them to be destroyed. Learning to live with other people - harmoniously and creatively - this is the most important thing that the members of the human race have to learn. It's not impossible. It involves living with one's self, and with God. The sooner we begin, the better off we shall be.

PRAYER: Guide us, Our Father, as we try to know ourselves as we really are - to live with ourselves, to accept ourselves, so that we may live with other people without hostility, resentment and jealousy. We know that when we fail, thou art ready to understand and to give us another chance, and for this we thank thee with all our hearts as we begin today to learn how to live with others. Amen

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“A Survey of European Civilization”
runs to 1,100 pages of closely-spaced type
in current editions. It is a hefty tome. In
Braille, it might take the skin off your
fingertips.

Tom McDoal, however, doesn't have
to worry about “S fingert” Tom, 22,
is ...