

Sermon: "...the Communion of Saints..."

1

Text: Romans 12:3-11.

Sermon Outline.



Introduction ~ This is the weekend we commemorate the event that saved Western Civilization: the D-Day Invasion of World War II, June 6th, 1944.

Canadian and British soldiers and American G.I.s dropped on, and stormed the beaches of, Normandy, France. A year later, Hitler and Nazi Germany were

overthrown. *The men who participated in D-Day are examples of the reality of commitment, the commitment to give all you have and all you are to make sure something crucial comes to pass.*

As believers in Jesus Christ, you and I are called to a life of commitment, a committed discipleship. Let's explore this together... commitment as a believer, commitment as disciples of Jesus Christ.

This morning, as we continue with the Apostles' Creed, we come to the phrase, "...the communion of saints..."

Of all elements in the Creed, this phrase is most prone to being completely misunderstood... simply because of the language and the vocabulary used.

- Most people can be forgiven for thinking this refers to the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, which many people also label, "Communion." Not here, at this point.
- Other people pick up on the noun, "saints," and guess that the Creed is describing God's martyrs and spiritual superstars up in heaven celebrating together. That's not in view here.
- Still others refer to the "mystical union" of all who believe, those who are alive today and those who have already preceded us into the presence of God. Again, not here.

All of these expressions are sublimely spiritual... but the Apostles' Creed is moving in a radically different direction. Are you confused, yet? Hang on...

This phrase in the Apostles' Creed is build on two basic words in the New Testament:

1. "Saints" -- Paul uses the word, "saints," to denote all authentic believers in Jesus Christ. You can see this clearly in the opening of the Letter to the Church in Philippi. "Paul and Timothy,

Text: Romans 12:3-11.

Sermon Outline.

servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi..." Phil 1:1 "Saints" refers to all authentic believers in Jesus Christ.

2. "Communion" – communion is the Old English word for fellowship. You find this word being used in the closing of II Corinthians, II Corinthians 13:14. "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit [that is, the fellowship the Holy Spirit creates in a group of people] be with you all."

Behind that English word, fellowship, is a marvelous Greek word, koinonia, κοινωνία. But there's a major problem: the English word, "fellowship," does not even come close to capturing the full meaning of koinonia.

Koinonia can be translated

1. partnership – partnership with one another – even teamwork, in a couple of places;
2. fellowship – fellowship with one another, excluding no other believer in Jesus Christ;
3. participation – mutual participation in each other's lives; or
4. sharing – sharing with one another.

Koinonia is the practical expression of self-giving love. In a matter of only seconds, most of us come up with several examples of giving in order to get something from somebody, "You-scratch-my-back-I'll-scratch-yours." From the halls of Congress to Donald Trump's latest wife or girl-friend and beyond, you recognize a person who gives only in order to get something from you. Underneath the giving to get something is a totally selfish motive.

With real koinonia, you give in order to meet and support somebody else in their need. The motive is selfless, self-giving love expressed in practical action. That's what motivates your participation in the life of another believer, another disciple.

So, this phrase in the Apostles' Creed is all about the mutual committed-ness of all authentic believers in Jesus Christ. Koinonia is the mutual commitment of "one another living." In our text, vs. 10 captures this basic of committed discipleship: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." The core idea is simply this:

Text: Romans 12:3-11.

Sermon Outline.

■ Jesus calls you and me to a life of mutual commitment as His disciples. Because we belong to Jesus, we belong to one another. Jesus calls us to a shared life of mutual commitment. If you belong to Jesus, you also belong to all those who belong to Jesus. If you have committed your life to Jesus Christ, you are also committed to all other disciples of Jesus. Jesus calls you and me to a shared life of mutual commitment.

★ In our text, Paul spells out three specifics in the mutual commitment expected and lived out by true disciples of Jesus.

I. The first specific is mutual loyalty, being loyal to one another. The disciple who is totally loyal to Jesus is also totally loyal to those other persons who belong to Jesus. You choose to be loyal even when it costs you something.

The disciple of Jesus lives out an unconditional personal loyalty to our risen Lord; but that's not all. The disciple lives out a total personal loyalty to other believers in Jesus Christ.

Before His death on the cross, Jesus taught His disciples about the quality of their loyalty to each other. After Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the disciples of Jesus live out a total personal loyalty to one another.



Stephen Ambrose wrote a marvelous book entitled, *Band of Brothers*. The book follows the men and experiences of E Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division from basic training in Toccoa, GA, through the airborne landings of D-Day, to Operation Market Garden to Bastogne to the end of the war. It is filled with story after personal story of mutual commitment. Ambrose shares this true story from Bastogne.

Corporal Joe Toye [front row, far right] of 2nd Platoon, Easy Company, was wounded three times *before* Bastogne. He caught some shrapnel on the way in to defend that city. Though Toye could have remained back in an aid station, Toye hopped a ride in a Jeep back to the front line. Heading across a field with his arm in a sling and a weapon in his other hand, Toye walked past his commanding officer, Lt. Dick Winters. Ambrose picks up their brief conversation.

Sermon: "...the Communion of Saints..."

4

Text: Romans 12:3-11.

Sermon Outline.

"Where are you going?" Winters asked. "You don't have to go back to the line."

"I want to go back with the fellows," Toye replied, and kept walking."

Whatever happened just outside of Bastogne, whether being killed or captured, Toye was going to go through it with his band of brothers. Friends, *that* is being committed.

But without question, the first Christians exhibited that level of mutual commitment to each other. For example, when Paul is under house arrest in Rome, anyone who visits him comes under suspicion, becomes a target for arrest and imprisonment, too. The Roman emperor Nero was a mad man. And yet, Epaphroditus, the pastor of the Church in Philippi, brings a substantial gift to support Paul in his rented space... at the risk of his own life. That is "the communion of saints," risking your life and your own personal comfort for another believer in need.

Jim Denison has been pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. While in college, Denison served as a summer missionary in East Malaysia. During one of their worship services, a teenage girl shared her faith in Christ in a small warehouse that was used for a church. She was baptized that day in their baptistry, a bathtub, and glowed with the love of Christ.

While all this was going on, Denison noticed some worn-out luggage leaning against the wall. He asked a church member for an explanation of the suitcase. He pointed to the girl who had been baptized and said, "Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage." She counted the cost of becoming a committed believer in Jesus Christ.

Jesus calls you and me to a shared life of mutual commitment. II. The second specific is a life that matches up with the Jesus lifestyle, a life of costly love for one another, loving another disciple even when it costs you something. Vss. 9 & 10 headline this specific.

In the late 60's, Francis Schaeffer wrote a stunning little book entitled, *The Mark of the Christian*. Schaeffer offers some timeless insights of the command of Jesus located in John, Chapter Thirteen,

verses thirty-four and thirty-five: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." [Our text in Romans contains a clear echo of this teaching of Jesus.] Francis Schaeffer says this:

"This passage reveals the mark that Jesus gives to label a Christian not just in one era or in one locality but at all times and all places until Jesus returns."

'Jesus gives the world the right to judge whether or not we are His disciples by the quality and the cost of the love we express to each other.'

Throughout the early churches, this was the expected lifestyle among those who belonged to Jesus. The pagans would sneer and laugh at the Gospel; but the love between believers struck them with awe and amazement. "See how those Christians love each other!"

That is what our phrase in the Apostles' Creed is all about. Jesus calls you and me to a shared life of mutual commitment, the specific commitment actually to live it out.

III. The third specific is exhorting and encouraging one another as believers in Jesus Christ. In verse one of Romans Twelve, Paul says, "... I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercy of God..." The word translated "urge" is frequently rendered elsewhere as, "encourage," and even, "exhort." "I exhort you by the mercy of God..."

Sprinkled throughout the New Testament are two related expressions, two different commands: "encourage one another" and "exhort one another." "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up." I Th 5:11 "Exhort each other daily." Hebrews 3:13 There can be a world of difference between these two commands even though they use the same word.

1. Exhortation is what a coach does with one of his players. If a rookie gets fooled by a pitch he's seen before in that situation, what happens? The batting coach will take him aside and explain what happened. And the purpose is what? Tell me... Bringing about a better outcome in the future... so that the

rookie won't get fooled by that same pitch the next time he faces that pitcher, right?

Exhortation is the verbal push to do better next time because we are capable to doing better. Exhortation is holding each other accountable to live consistently as a disciple of Jesus even when it costs you something to get it right.

2. Positive Encouragement is when you and I motivate each other to whatever it takes to live a consistent life as a disciple of Jesus. The encouragement can focus on one of the Three Priorities...

A. "Hey, have you had any God-encounters lately in your personal time alone with God?" "What issue has the Lord been working with you on this week?" "How's your daily Bible-reading and prayer coming along? Have you found the right time in the day for that to happen?" Or,

B. "Is there some way you can help with that class? What if you were to discover you have the spiritual gift of teaching?" "Jeff needs a ride to the Bible study; can you pick him up?" Or,

C. "Have you heard from the Lord Jesus about someone to invite to worship?"

Conclusion ~ ■ Jesus calls us to a life of koinonia, mutual commitment and mutual encouragement. Jesus calls you and me to a shared life of mutual commitment.

The pastor of an underground Chinese church to a group of Southern Baptists about the precautions they must take to avoid persecution. Each time their church reaches ten to fifteen members, they split to reduce attention. They also alternate meeting places for the same reason.

Because phone lines are monitored, members meet with a volunteer on a downtown street to find out where the church will meet next. One such volunteer was discovered, arrested, beaten and put in prison. He lost his job, house and medical benefits. Another man stepped in and took his place. He, too, suffered the same fate.

Sermon: "...the Communion of Saints..."

7

Text: Romans 12:3-11.

Sermon Outline.

One of the western visitors said, "I suppose you have difficulty filling this job."

The Chinese pastor replied, "No. We have a waiting list."

Jesus expects you and me to live... not as mere converts, not as mere sympathizers of the Christian faith, not as spectators in the bleachers or the pews. Jesus calls us to discipleship and commitment. Jesus expects you and me to live out our total commitment as His disciples and our total commitment to one another. That's "the communion" – the shared, mutual commitment -- of the saints."