

## Agree to Disagree in Love - In Life

Short Version    Readers Theater

The church was putting on the traditional pageant. The pageant went perfectly until the arrival of the angels. As the children, robed in traditional white, jockeyed for position, a girl who was smaller than many, ended up so far out on the fringes. Even by craning her neck and standing on tiptoe she could not see Jesus in the manger. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among all," the children sang on cue. In the brief pause that followed, the small girl, saddened at having her view blocked, called out in a voice, shrill with irritation and frustration, "**Let Jesus show!**"

Our busyness, our worry, our stress, even our enjoyment of many good things, help hide Jesus from us. As we observe the world, as we try to enjoy life to the fullest, as we relate to friends, coworkers, neighbors and family, we get caught up in all kinds of tensions. Jesus gets hidden from us. When have you like the little girl, wanted to say, "Let Jesus show!"

Today we conclude our series on agreeing and disagreeing in love. We looked at the thinking patterns that help us manage conflict. We've studied actions that help us live with others in peace. Today we focus on some more attitudes. The bottom line of this sermon series and being followers of Jesus is that we want to let Jesus show through us. When life is going well or not so well in our thoughts and actions and in all of life, let Jesus show! This is how God transforms the world - as you and I let Jesus show.

But so often we get caught up in not being loving enough. We allow minor matters to become more important than loving each other. We allow our personal pet peeves and fears to keep us from working together for unity. We debate theology, argue about church decisions, and glorify traditions, over and above valuing our relationships. Or we value relationships so much that we don't embrace openly working at conflict. At times we allow one person to stop forward momentum. But we know there is another way. These instructions give us

biblical practical guidelines, on how to love one another - this is the way of life and joy.

Jesus' dream is that you and I embrace conflict as a normal part of life. Our lives shine in how we respond, how we manage ourselves, and how we show love to others - regardless of what others have done or not done. We show love by addressing, not avoiding, difficult situations and behaviors. It's not uncommon that in our work settings we have policies for conducting ourselves and to settle disputes. This document on agreeing and disagreeing, with the key verse, "Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," as individuals and as the body of Christ is our guideline on how to let Jesus show in our thoughts, our actions and in daily life.

The key point for the Christian is love. Jesus is love – in grace & truth. Unless we have love & think & act in the spirit of love, we are a noisy gong, a clanging symbol. Notice that the first fruit of the Spirit is love. Jesus lived to show us how to love in specific ways and he chose to go to the cross and die in love for you and me.

People demonstrate so the world will know what they stand for, what's truly important to them, what they're passionate about. Jesus Christ gave his followers specific instructions on how to demonstrate their Christian faith. On the night of his betrayal, Jesus Christ took on the role of a servant and washed his followers' feet, something that was countercultural, something that Peter nearly refused to have done because it went so against the grain of their culture. Then Jesus said these words: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this will all people know that you are my followers, if you love one another" (J13:34-36).

We cannot escape that Jesus' love makes us love others. **Be steadfast in love** is the first of our four policies in the In Life section. It reads: Be firm in our commitment to seek a mutual solution. Be stubborn in holding to our common foundation in Christ. Be steadfast in love.

Steadfast means unwavering, resolute, persistent, dedicated, committed, unfaltering, firm and unswerving. In the thesaurus the word loyal also came up. Loyal means dependable, faithful, reliable, constant, stalwart, trusty, and devoted. These words describe how our love is to be - toward everyone and toward God.

Steadfast loyal foot washing love is focused on the other person. It's self emptying as a way of life. It's acknowledging our vulnerabilities, our failures, and our needs. Instead of proudly defending ourselves, or worrying about our dignity, being fearful, or expecting others to make the first move, we reach out to those with whom we experience conflict. The Christian values love so much - we think and act and live it. That's the bottom line.

Instead of secretly harboring our hurt, being a victim, we ask someone to assist us. That's the next guideline. **Be open to mediation.** Be open to accept skilled help. If we cannot reach agreement among ourselves, we will use those with gifts and training in mediation in the larger church. So we get help. In our scripture readings we heard Paul plea with Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Then he asked the saints at Philippi to help these women get back in right relationship.

The next point is to **trust the community.** If we cannot reach agreement and experience reconciliation, we will turn the decision over to others in the congregation or from the broader church. In one to one or small group or congregational, conference or denominational disputes, this may mean allowing others to arbitrate or implement constitutional decision-making processes, insuring that they are done in the spirit of these guidelines, and abiding by whatever decision is made.

This is more than being a democracy in church. It's choosing to trust each other and allow the voice of the community to speak into a situation. People need to be willing to go one under. That means, consider that the other person or opinion might be right or better. It means going and washing their feet. I believe that

much of what we end up arguing about, God doesn't really care about.

Too often pride is what the problem is, not the issue or the principle. When people genuinely disagree passionately - that's where openness with transparency and bringing in the broader community can be helpful. But not with the attitude of a power struggle, manipulation, or with the fierce desire to get my way. How we do conflict is where Jesus shows.

Lastly, number 12, we are reminded to **be the body of Christ.** Believe in and rely on the Body of Christ and its commitment to peace and justice, rather than resort to the courts of law. We are to commit to working at unity instead of getting people to agree with us. We are to commit to let Jesus show in all we think, do and say. And we need to spend time in prayer - quietly waiting on the Holy Spirit to give us direction.

Asking for mediators and then maybe involving the church community, involves risk. Events go beyond our control. When we don't know where to turn, or are stuck in our opinions and feelings, the situation is beyond us and we need outside help. We need more perspective than we have.

And we are to have the mind of Christ. We are to dress in the wardrobe God has picked out for us that our Colossians text describes - kindness, compassion, humility, quiet strength, even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offence and with self discipline. Jesus is our example. Jesus poured himself out, set aside the privileges that were rightfully his. He did nothing wrong yet he died. He set aside his rights for our well being. May we be willing to do the same so Jesus shows. He's our example.

Josh McDowell, a dedicated Christian intellectual, wrote, "I was invited to speak in a university in South America. Because of the university's Marxist leanings, I was the first American to speak there in four years, and it was a tense situation. "Big photographs of me

had been posted all over campus, and the Communist students, trying to influence the other students to stay away from the meeting, had painted 'CIA Agent' in red letters across the posters. But it backfired on them. Most of the students had never seen a CIA agent, so they came to the meeting to see what one looked like, and the room was packed.

"However, as is often the case when someone speaks in that part of the world, professional Marxist agitators had also come, and their intent was to disrupt the meeting. And what happened next was horrible. One after another, these agitators would jump up and throw accusations at me, call me 'a filthy pig,' and hurl words at me in their own language that I didn't know. Right in front of the audience they twisted me around their little fingers. I couldn't answer them; I didn't even know what they were saying.

"I felt so sorry for the Christians who were there because they had looked forward so eagerly to my coming to the campus and to seeing people come to Christ." After 45 minutes of this heckling, I was ready to give up. Every time I even mentioned the name of Jesus they laughed. And I thought, 'God, why aren't you doing something? Why are you letting Satan win?' Well, evidently, I wasn't walking by faith. You see, God works when it brings the greatest honor and glory to His name, not to ours.

"Finally, God started to work. The secretary of the Revolutionary Student Movement stood up, and everyone else became silent. I figured she must be someone important. She was quite an outspoken woman, and I didn't know what to expect. But this is what she said, 'Mr. McDowell, if I become a Christian tonight, will God give me the love for people that you have shown for us?'" Dr. McDowell ends the story by saying, "Well, I don't have to tell you what happened. It broke just about everyone's heart who was there, and we had 58 decisions for Christ." Let Jesus show.

As we move through this list of guidelines when we face conflict, we find ourselves in the light of Jesus. This last stage, in life, may be the hardest for us to move beyond personal initiative and engage the community around us. But we can adapt the self emptying love of Jesus that took Jesus to the cross. We divest ourselves of the old and unhelpful behaviors so prevalent in life and put on the garments of love, forgiveness, truth and grace. We keep learning how to manage disagreements better. Our challenge is - let Jesus show!

The heart of Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love, in life, begins and ends with the spirit of the people in this story. The invitation of I John remains for us today. "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

Years ago in East Africa the missionaries and the African Christians began to argue and fight and snipe at each other. Some thought they were better than others. Personal preferences and theological views were grounds for fighting. Race became an issue. They were stuck with an abundance of pride and ego.

Then in God's mercy, missionaries and Africans, found themselves at the cross, standing as equals. A revival called the East Africa Revival began and has been a formative experience for a whole generation of God's people. This revival movement was marked with a spirit of humility and brokenness, honesty and vulnerability, acknowledging and naming of their sins. They walked in the light of God with each other, and sought forgiveness of one another. They washed each others feet in so many ways. They went one under with each other. They let Jesus show.