

Pastor Jon's January 31, 2021 Sermon

Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

“What does food offered to idols have to do with us today?”

I am thankful for the books of 1st and 2nd Corinthians in the Bible. They had issues and conflicts like all of us.

The Corinthians were mostly Gentile believers in Christ in a church who's community was threatened because of their differences. The Apostle Paul writes letters to the Corinthian church about various conflicts they were dealing with in the church and appeals to the concept of love in Christ to hold them together. “Love builds up” says Paul in 8:1.

In 1st Corinthians 13, most know it as the wedding scripture, where Paul lifts up love as the greatest gift of all. Love here is agape in the original Greek. Agape is the unconditional love God has for us. Loving the other without getting anything in return. This is extremely hard as humans to love unconditionally. God's love for us in Jesus Christ is agape.

Paul says in 1st Corinthians 13 that love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. You can have the most amazing spiritual gifts in the world, like speaking in tongues, or having ultimate generosity, or possessing a faith that can move mountains, but if you don't use those gifts in the spirit of love for others you are nothing. For Paul, loving your neighbor is the royal law that rules the day to in spite our differences. Paul wants to build community up, not tear it down.

Our text for today in the Corinthian Church is about the controversy of eating meat sacrificed to idols. Not so much a problem in our time. In the marketplaces, animals, that people used to make sacrifices to Greek and Roman Gods, would be sold for a price. Some in the Christian community bought this meat and ate it. Other church members saw this and found it to be a stumbling block to their faith... a very disturbing practice and offensive. Some were offended and others found it completely acceptable. Some had the knowledge that no idols really exist and that there is only one God. But not all people

in the church possessed this knowledge and logic. Paul called those without this knowledge weaker Christians. To eat this meat could cause them to do the same, like drinking in front of an alcoholic. Or eating this meat could run them off. Paul named both of these sin. And when you sin against a member of your family (church), Paul says you sin against Christ. Although we have come a long way since Biblical times and all the food controversies in the early Christian church, we still have differences that potentially can divide us.

Right now, a few issues that could offend others are: Holding in-person worship, wearing masks, or getting the vaccine. Wearing a mask, for example, really is about first protecting others, then protecting yourself. There are so many others... but for political reasons I don't want to get into them. But you get the point. You watch the news.

But many of these arguments come down to personal liberty. I have a right to do whatever I want. It is a free country. This may be so...

But for Christians, we are called to live differently. Paul says in verse 9, "9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak." In other words, when do your personal freedoms cross the line?

Paul says, if what you are doing causes someone to stumble in their faith or otherwise, then don't do it... out of love for them. Even if you have knowledge greater than theirs, you can't dismiss their reality. Paul says if it were me, I wouldn't eat the meat.

And how you handle things matters. We are so quick to judge. Confronting someone should be done in love.

As a Christians, we know we are sinners. We know we potentially can hurt someone every day with our words or actions. And for this, there is grace. Christ's work on the cross forgives us. This love Christ had for us is what our community is meant to be built on. God's unconditional love for us and our love for others.

I don't know about you, but when I am backed into a corner I can get pretty stubborn and ornery. But I am also a Christian and need these reminders that it isn't about me all the time. How can we grow as a

community of grace and love for each other amidst our differences?
If the Corinthians could do it, we can too.

Amen.