

## **Sermon: We need each other**

### **2 Corinthians 7.2-16**

*Rev Dr Jos Strengholt*

Today we finish our series of sermons on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. He began his letter by underlining that God is the Father of all Comfort.

Paul had experienced much tension in his relationship with the church in Corinth; he had been somewhat depressed; he had to sort out many issues between him and the church in Corinth. On top of this, he was persecuted by Jewish synagogues and Roman authorities.

In spite of all this, he is comforted.

We face so many struggles in life. Often things seem to go exactly as we did not like them to go. We have troubles with friends, sickness in families, many financial tensions. How can we in the midst of that, experience the comforting presence of God? We can learn from Paul's approach.

#### **1 Blessing of relationship restored**

First, it is clear from his letter and from the passage that we read today, that the desire for a sense of peace and comfort in life, cannot be obtained by avoiding conflicts. Paul had taken tough action against some people in church.

Certain problems in life must be tackled, not ignored. The man or woman who allows a perilous situation to develop because he shrinks from dealing with it, will face more dangers.

The parent who exercises no discipline because he fears unpleasantness with his children, will see the bad results later in life.

The man who will not grasp the thorns of danger because he wants to find the flower of safety, in the end simply piles up greater trouble for himself.

Trouble is like disease. If it is dealt with at the right time, it can often easily be eradicated; if not, it can become an incurable cancer.

It often happens that the person who seeks an easy peace finds in the end nothing but trouble.

Paul's action against some people who opposed him, seemed to have worked. Problems between some people had been solved, and the congregation in Corinth and Paul were on the same page again.

Paul had underlined that he had done nothing wrong - he had wronged no-one, he had corrupted no-one, he had taken advantage of no-one. Those were obviously the accusations leveled at him by some who thought he was just a weak apostle. But the church in Corinth realized that the apostle was indeed the one whom they should support.

Maybe the fact that Paul, even though severely attacked, continued to be kind and loving, even to those who opposed him, had convinced the people.

Paul did not want to knock anyone down, but rather, he wanted all people restored into a relationship of peace. He did not act tough to knock them down, but to lift them up; it was not to discourage them, but to encourage them; it was not simply to eradicate the evil, but to make the good grow.

And likewise, we should correct out of love, not out of desire to hurt but with affectionate intention of getting our friends, our children, or our colleagues, to change when we are sure that this is needed.

In his very useful commentary on this letter of Paul, the Anglican priest William Barclay wrote this:

Paul was a missionary statesman of sufficient stature to see beyond momentary lapses to the inherent value of these believers. He saw their potential and remembered their success. Unpleasant incidents even when directed at him personally could not blind him to the genuine greatness of his church in which outstanding spiritual victories had occurred. This is why Paul could genuinely say that these people were in his heart.

Because he acted with love and firmness, the problems were solved and Paul felt comforted.

We all, I guess, remember times in childhood when we had done something wrong and there was a barrier between us and our parents. We all know that can still happen between us and those we love.

And we all know the flood of relief and the happiness when the barriers are gone and we are at one again with those we love. In the last analysis the man who cherishes bitterness hurts no one more than he hurts himself. Reconciliation, a restoration of relationships, is extremely comforting.

## **2 Paul comforted by his friend Titus**

Paul is joyful now, proud of those believers in Corinth, and he is comforted. Remember how depressed he seems to have been? All that is over now.

A few chapters earlier, in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, Paul wrote that he was in the city of Troas, with open doors for ministry, but he suffered too many problems from outside the church - some persecutions - and he suffered from not finding his colleague Titus.

He missed Titus because he was waiting for Troas to return from Corinth. He hoped for good news, that the congregations there had been reconciled with Paul. As he did not get that good news, he decided to move on to Macedonia. Probably because he knew that Titus would travel back to Troas via Macedonia.

So Paul set out to Macedonia, to meet Titus quicker. To get the news from Corinth as quickly as possible. He met Titus somewhere in Macedonia and learned to his overflowing joy that the trouble was over, the breach was healed and all was well. That is the background of events against which this passage must be read and it makes it very rich.

And the good news from the church in Corinth - Paul considered them his spiritual children - was so comforting for Paul. It is so satisfying when people who are close to us, who are dear to us, are doing well, and when we know that they hold us in their hearts as we hold them in our hearts.

The deepest joy that a son or a daughter or a scholar or a student can bring to parent or teacher is to demonstrate that they are as good as the parent or the teacher believes them to be. Life's sorest tragedy is disappointed hopes and life's greatest joy is hopes come true.

Paul was not only comforted because he and the Corinthians were reconciled; he was also comforted, because Titus has received comfort from the Corinthians. There is joy in seeing someone you love welcomed and well-treated.

And the bottle of comfort is not empty yet; Paul says he was also comforted by the presence of Titus himself. He was not only waiting for some good news via Titus, but Titus was also part of the good news for Paul. He was a colleague and friend that he loved much. He missed him badly when he was gone. When he came back to Paul, Paul was comforted and his depressed feelings were gone.

Titus was God's answer to Paul's depression. Problems solved, at least for the time being; but also - a friend with him.

God uses means to bless you. He used wine and bread to bless us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. He uses Titus, a friend, to bless Paul with God's comfort.

For comforting us, for giving us peace and joy, God uses other people.

### **3 Be a Titus for someone**

Yes, it is God who comforts us. No doubt. Paul calls God the Father of all Comfort, and Jesus told us that he will send us his Holy Spirit as a Comforter.

This word Comforter is in Greek Parakletos, and that means comfort, surely. But the more basic meaning of the word is advocate. Parakletos literally means: someone who is called beside you. And that is also the exact meaning of advocate. someone who has been called to be beside you.

God stands beside you to defend you; the Holy Spirit is with us to defend us. To uphold us. To make sure we experience the joy and peace of God; to comfort us.

If you are in need for comfort, ask God. We are always in need for God to strengthen us and give us joy and comfort and stamina. Life can be quite hard.

And how does God answer your prayers for comfort? How does he do this? As Paul expressed so clearly - usually through other people. In the community. God used the Corinthians for comforting Titus, and he used Titus for comforting Paul. God's method of comforting us seems an ever continuing cycle. I comfort you, you comfort me, you comfort others, others comfort you and me.

So ask your self this question. How can you contribute to this cycle of comfort, love, peace, joy, that seems to be God manner of blessing us? How do you encourage, strengthen others? How do you give more peace and joy to others?

It is very easy to be part of a church, and just come to receive. The sermon must be good, the music must be okay, the Holy Communion blesses you, and the coffee is free. But this is not how we should be part of our community here.

The community you are part of is entitled to your pro-active role as someone who is a blessing for others. And if that is how we all behave, we all benefit.

Yes I know. Sometimes you are so much in need of being comforted and loved that you cannot contribute much. Paul suffered from feeling so bad and he was so much in need of comfort. It happens. That is fine. If you are part of a comforting community, you will be fine again, because other people will carry you through. We are, after all, in the same boat, with our ups and down.

But if you are in rather normal circumstances, you are quite able to encourage someone. You can bring a smile on a face. The support you give to someone else, is the expression of God's Holy Spirit Comfort. This is how God uses you - and all of us.

The support you give to someone else is nothing less than God's Holy Spirit at work. This is how God works to comfort you and to comfort others. Imagine - you have gold in your hands - and God asks you to share this with others.

To be such a person is wonderful - for others and also for yourself. You never become poorer from giving away comfort, and peace, and love. Always give more to others. And if we all do this, we will all be fine. We will all be encouraged by God, we will experience his loving care, if we all decide to be such a person for other people.

## **Conclusion**

Paul needed Titus. Other people need you.

Make it your plan, your target, to say a few encouraging words to someone today before the sun goes down.

All things look so much better when we are able to be kind and loving to others.

Whose shoulder is waiting for your arm?

Whose ears are waiting for your kind words?

Whose hearts are in need of some friendliness?

You do not need to look far. We all need comfort and peace and joy. And you can be God's arm, God's mouth, God's smile for others.

AMEN