

January 15, 2006

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene (beginning of the "One Another Series")
"Welcome One Another"

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The Reverend Dr. **Martin Luther King, Jr.** (January 15, 1929 - April 4, 1968)
Nobel Peace Prize (Oct 14, 1964), Baptist minister and civil rights activist.
He was a leader of the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, which began when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white person.

He organized and led marches for the right to vote, desegregation, fair hiring, and other basic civil rights. Most of these rights were successfully enacted into US law with the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act.

He is perhaps most famous for his "I Have A Dream" speech, given in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. He is regarded as one of the great leaders and heroes in America's history, and in the modern history of nonviolence.

Today's message is about accepting one another, specifically in the church.

Rom 15:7 AMP

Welcome and receive [to your hearts] one another, then, even as Christ has welcomed and received you, for the glory of God.

Your purpose on earth is not to acquire wealth, success, status or even happiness. Those are secondary issues. **Life is about love** and developing relationships – with God and with other people. Jesus put it this way (Matt 22:37-39 NLT) “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.*” *This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*” The first purpose we were created for is to know and love God. Our second purpose is to be in God's family and love one another.

The Bible says that God is love, therefore wants us to learn to love because He wants us to become more like Him. (1 John 4:7-8 NLT) “*Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God--for God is love.*” If you do not have love for others, if you are more concerned about your own needs, then you should question whether Christ is really in your life. If you are not sure about your salvation, a good question to ask is, “Do I love other believers?”

God loves you deeply and unconditionally. Now He wants you to learn to love Him and others in the same way, especially those in the family of God – other followers of Jesus, the people you sit next to or in back of or in front of every Sunday in church.

There are a few problems, one is that it is human nature to think of ourselves first. Love is unnatural for us. The good news is that Jesus changes hearts, He puts love in our hearts. Another problem is that some people seem unlovable, some are mean, and some are even resistant to kindness. But love is patient and kind and never gives up. We are to overcome evil with good. Another problem is that we have been taught that love is a feeling and that we should only do what we feel like doing. That is wrong. Love is an action. We are not only to do what we feel like doing, but we are to do everything God commands us to do. Love is a command. One reason I know love is an action before it is a feeling is that Jesus commanded us to love our enemies. He said if they are hungry feed them, if they are thirsty give them something to drink. You don't feel like doing kind things for your enemies, therefore Jesus is telling us to do kind things even though you don't feel like doing it, because love is an action.

Jesus said if we love Him we will keep His commands. Well, He commands us to love. To keep the first and greatest commandment to love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind then you have to keep the second commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself." We love God by loving one another.

We can learn to love and God will help us. One way He helps us is putting us in community with other believers. **Love requires community.** We can't love in isolation. God treasures relationships and being in God's family is the highest honor and the greatest privilege you will ever receive. God wants His family to be known for their love more than anything else. Jesus said (John 13:35 TLB), "*Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*" In other words Jesus was saying that more important than doctrine or style of worship or how much Christian education we have is love. (1 Cor 8:1NIV) "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." We are meant to be in community, fellowship, family, we cannot fulfill God's purposes by ourselves. (Rom 12:5b NLT) "*since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.*" We must admit that we need each other. There are two reasons why that is difficult. First our culture admires, individualism, independent, self-sufficient people who seem to get along well by themselves. But the sad truth is, below the surface of that confident appearance is usually a lonely, insecure person. Loneliness is a common problem in our world, yet we continue to put walls up in our relationships instead of building bridges. A second reason we have difficulty admitting we need each other is pride. This is especially true of men who usually feel it is an admission of weakness to ask for help or admit need. There is no shame in needing others, as a matter of fact, God created us to depend on each other in the family of God.

Over the next few weeks I like to point out to you many of the "one another" commands of the Bible. Today I want to begin with this:

Rom 15:7 AMP

Welcome and receive [to your hearts] one another, then, even as Christ has welcomed and received you, for the glory of God.

1. Welcome one another. One dictionary defined *welcome* as “To receive or accept w/pleasure or satisfaction.” The church welcomes all people. No matter what their ethnic background is and not matter what their moral history is, all are joyfully received and accepted.

We must acknowledge one another as Christians, and treat one another as such, though you may differ in opinion about many smaller matters.

We cannot be caught up in dissension, disagreements, or arguments, especially about trivial matters. Instead, we should lovingly accept one another-there is to be no one-sided acceptance. All are to accept one another and live in harmony. At one time, we all were weak And many strong believers are still weak in some areas.

The Roman church was a mixed community. It was made up of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, rich and poor, strong and weak. So it was difficult for them to accept one another. This is why Paul writes this command to the Roman church.

Accepting means taking people into our homes as well as into our hearts, sharing meals and activities, and avoiding racial and economic discrimination. We must go out of our way to avoid favoritism. Consciously spend time greeting those you don't normally talk to, minimize differences, and seek common ground for fellowship.

We may not be able to be close to all those in the church but all must feel welcomed. Receive each one to your hearts. Accept one another welcome one another...

2. Even as Christ has welcomed and received you.

If Christ received us, and bears with all our weaknesses, well may we receive and show compassionate one another

Jesus is our model of what acceptance means. When we realize that Christ accepted us, as unlovely and sinful and immature as we were when we came to him, then we will accept our brothers and sisters. The world sits up and takes notice when believers of widely differing backgrounds practice Christ like acceptance.

3. For the glory of God.

Accept, welcome, and receive one another in the same way Christ has accepted you because this brings praise to God. By so doing God will be glorified.

If our goal is to glorify God in all we do, and it ought to be, then we must accept one another as Christ has accepted us.