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Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church  
Knoxville, Tennessee  
Dr. Jay Howell  
January 26, 2020  

“Real: Benedicting, Benedicts”  
2 Corinthians 13:11-13  

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“Real: Benedicting, Benedicts”  
2 Corinthians 13:11-13

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“Real: Benedicting, Benedicts”
2 Corinthians 13:11-13

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“Real: Benedicting, Benedicts”
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“Real: Benedicting, Benedicts”  
2 Corinthians 13:11-13

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“Real: Benedicting, Benedicts”  
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Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church
Knoxville, Tennessee
Dr. Jay Howell
January 26, 2020

“Real: Benedicting, Benedicts”
2 Corinthians 13:11-13

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Today, we wrap up our January sermon series “Real.” Because of the congregational meeting, today’s sermon is a bit on the shorter side, which I’m sure you are all lamenting. First a quick word on what we’ll be starting next week. I want to thank and embarrass one of our elders Elise Denny, who’s a member of our choir and Chair of the Worship Committee. Last Fall as we were talking in Worship Committee about what we might explore in worship this year, she raised the topic of just how difficult it can be to give an account for our faith in the face of some of the hardest challenges. We’ll start a new series next week called “Apologies,” to see what Scripture has to say about it. One more side note, y’all. No joke about this preaching poll that’s in your bulletins. You give us ideas; we’re liable to use them.

If you’ve been with us this month in this series, you’ll remember that our focus has been on how we hold ourselves back from true fellowship, things we put in the way of truly knowing and being known in the church. And the fact that we do these things is a really big deal, because it is in the core identity of the church to come together, to stay together, to exhibit love for each other in such a way that the only possible explanation is that there’s a power at work that is not of this world. For two weeks we were in the first letter of John and how sin and hatred can prevent us from truly knowing each other. Then last week Pastor Rachel preached on 2 Corinthians 12 and how our weaknesses shouldn’t lead us to hide from each other, but rather to know each other better and to glorify God in our weakness.

This week, we look at the close of this second letter to the Corinthians, a word of blessing, and ask, if all that sin, all that hatred, all that weakness are things that hold us back from true fellowship, what binds us together? Will you pray with me?

*Holy God, for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.*

In the Revolutionary War, there was one man who had distinguished himself in battle, and so he rose up the ranks and eventually became a general in George Washington’s Continental Army. However, the general also had some sharp elbows and an ambitious streak, which on occasion put him at odds with other officers and even with the Continental Congress, leading him to hold grudges and perceive that he had been stepped over for various commands and places of prestige in the army.

Later in the war, he was stationed in Philadelphia and there met and married a young woman whose family had deeply Loyalist connections, that is, still loyal to the British. Those connections led to a secret and illegal correspondence with a British major. Seeing a chance for advancement if he switched sides and the British won, the general ultimately cooked up a plot to surrender, of all places, the fort at West Point to the British.
The plot, however, was discovered. The British major was hanged as a spy, but the general escaped to England after the war. He didn’t get away scott free, as his reputation as a self-serving turncoat followed him, and he never had too much success after the war, but perhaps the most indicting thing about him is that today when we say his name, Benedict Arnold, as in, “that person’s a Benedict Arnold,” we mean a traitor.

Something bitterly ironic that one of the first things we think of when we hear “Benedict,” beside brunch of course, is betrayal. Because the name in itself doesn’t mean anything close to that. It comes from Latin, for you scholars out there, from a compound word meaning a “good word,” and most often it means a blessing. It’s why we have a Benediction at the end of our worship service, so that even when the preacher’s doing fire and brimstone, by the end you have to at least say something nice, the final words we share together are good words, a word of blessing.

And one of the most familiar blessings, or benedictions, in all of Scripture is the final verse of 2 Corinthians: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” A lot of preachers conclude worship with those very words. Another common one, and the one I usually use is what we read in the Book of Numbers a moment ago, but this blessing, this benediction in 2 Corinthians and the couple of verses before it convey so much about the fellowship of the church and what it could be.

Just in vv. 11 and 12, Paul offers a list of instructions and encouragements: “Finally brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.” Now each one of those could be a sermon in itself, but more broadly what Paul is doing here, especially when he says, “and the God of love and peace will be with you,” is offering a list of qualities that mark true fellowship, fellowship within which the God of love and peace will dwell.

“Put things in order.” Life together in the church shouldn’t be chaotic. Sure, things will be messy sometimes, but that’s not what we should strive for together.

“Listen to my appeal.” Now that’s honestly an odd translation there for what the word means. Some of your Bibles might have a footnote next to it, saying something like “encourage one another,” and that’s closer. Literally it’s “Be called to one another’s side.” It’s the same word that the Gospel of John uses to describe the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Advocate, the Comforter. So another way to say it might be “be each other’s advocate” or “have each other’s back.” As we gather in fellowship, there’s a call to be bound to each other, to link arms together, to be at each other’s side in support and exhortation.

“Agree with one another,” literally “be of one mind.” And “live in peace.” Well that’s easy. The church over the centuries hasn’t had any problems on that front agreeing with each other and living in peace.

So just do all those things, put things in order, have each other’s backs, agree with each other, and live in peace, and the God of love and peace will dwell with you. Easy peasy, right? No
surprise that it sounds downright impossible. If those are the marks of true fellowship, why even offer them if they’re so far out of reach?

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