

## From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church...

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### What We Really Want Rev. Julie G. Olmsted

Paul knew about groups. He knew about community. Paul was tireless, passionate, brilliant and committed. He was an evangelist, a preacher, a teacher and a consultant. Paul knew what people really wanted. He was (and is) considered the Apostle to the Gentiles. Those who were not Jews were his particular constituency, even though Paul himself was a fiercely observant and devoted Jew. His planting of churches was a testament of his self-proclaimed, God-given calling of bringing non-Jewish people into right relationship with the God of Israel through the new covenant brought into the faith by Jesus.

Apart from all that, Paul understood the strength and weaknesses of any congregation. His words ring true because the traps that human beings fall into are not time bound. These words of admonition are as true for us as the church today as they were when Paul wrote them. Paul understood that people, although good and well-meaning at their core, can become confused about what they really want.

Our scripture refers mainly to anger and discord within the congregation, but of course these instructions are valid for individuals, families and even modern day organizations. People can become confused. They think they want to be right. They think they want to win. They think they want to be victorious over someone else rather than be victorious over themselves. They think they want revenge or to prove a point. They think they want to dominate, or stay angry, prove the other wrong, or just simply act out some hurtful scenario. They may even think they want to split apart and go do their own thing. (This is where the idea of denominations came from. This is why the UCC is united and “uniting.”) But Paul understands that what people really want is fellowship, kindness, goodwill and peace of mind. These are things that are hard won because they don’t often come naturally. These are godly qualities and godly qualities have to be worked at. That is where spiritual discipline comes in. That is why the church is an experiment, not a business or a corporation.

Don’t be angry and sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger. Don’t hold grudges. Don’t let evil come out of your mouth. What is evil? Anything that does not guard someone’s dignity and worth. Anything that puts another down or is marked by

pettiness and half-truth. This is a tall order for any community trying to do something worthwhile, even lofty. This message is to the church itself-the church of Paul's time and the church of your grandparents' time and the church of our time.

I have a little formula of my own that I try to follow. It helps me in my striving to become like Paul outlines in the scripture. I saw it last year on the door of a nursing home and I copied it down. I keep it with me and am thinking about putting it on my office door here at the church.

Here it is: Before you speak, T-H-I-N-K about what you are going to say:

Is it truthful? It may seem truthful, but stop and think: Do I really know what I'm talking about here? This means I stop and am really deliberate about what I am saying... OR I remain silent.

Is it helpful? There may be things I know, but is my saying them going to help anyone? Does it help the hearer or the one about whom I am speaking? Does it help my soul? Or is it best left unsaid, at least for now.

Is it inspiring? Not everything we say can be inspiring, but some things can. This may be a challenge, but it's worth thinking about anyway. You can inspire others by choosing to not say something, or giving someone the benefit of the doubt.

Is it necessary? This has been great for me. Sometimes people can just carelessly put things out there and have no conception that it could be hurting someone, or putting toxic waste into the atmosphere. A teacher of mine once told me that gossip was unnecessary conversation. Something to think about...

Is it kind? The most important one to consider, I believe Paul would say. In our lives together, being kind is probably even more important than being truthful. That is, if the truth is hurtful, think twice. Think about you really want. Do you want to be right? Or do you want to be happy? More specifically, do you want to go deep into your spiritual life? If so, being kind is all-important.

Paul knew that the Body of Christ is a precious thing, to be protected, cherished, nurtured and recognized as something holy, not to be taken for granted. Paul knew that what people wanted, despite ample evidence to the contrary. He knew that people wanted a beloved community. People wanted to become Christian, not in name only, but in practice. People wanted the peace of Christ, which is something that Paul had found, and others knew existed but found it to be fleeting, illusory, and maybe a little "airy-fairy." Paul knew how to maintain it, not just as a thrill on Sunday morning, but

an everyday reality. Following his formula of right speech and kindness was a sure way.

Jesus' life was a "fragrant offering." How extraordinary, to think that your life and my life could be such! Our lives can bless others and even **BETTER GOOD NEWS** is that we can experience our own lives as that fragrant offering when we follow these instructions for our own blessed community, right here, right now.

That, my friends, is what we really, truly want.