

The Reverend's Ruminations

As many of us do, I recently received an electronic calendar notification that I had created to remind me of an important anniversary. In this case, it had now been six years ago that I had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to officiate my sister's wedding at our home church in Winnebago. It was a beautiful service, complete with a guest organist to blow the cobwebs out of the organ and even a bagpiper for the processional and recessional. Perhaps best of all was the huge assembly of family and friends, some of whom I hadn't seen in a decade or more (and most of whom had not yet seen me in my ministerial role). It is always heartwarming to see so many familiar faces at a milestone event like a baptism, confirmation, graduation, wedding, or even funeral. The challenge of course is that there is never enough time to catch up with all of them within the limited confines of a reception—particularly over the music and excitement of a wedding dance!

As I paused to look back at the bulletin from that joyous day, I was reminded of one of the passages we chose for the ceremony, from Romans 12:9-18—subtitled in some Bibles as "Marks of the True Christian." So much of Paul's advice in this section of Romans reads like advice for newlyweds, even if it was originally written to encourage his growing congregations of new Christians in Rome. Verse 10, which in the New International Version reads, "*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love,*" drew some laughs at the wedding when I noted that we had conveniently chosen to omit the word *brotherly* when the Scripture passage was read by a cousin of the groom. I think all of us can recall times when brotherly (or sisterly) "love" was not exactly what we'd wish on anyone's marriage relationship!?!

But beyond the very applicable words for a wedding, Paul does encourage some tough concepts that are just as challenging for us today as they must have been for those early Christians amidst the hedonistic Roman culture. "*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them,*" he says in verse 14. This is no easier as an adult than it was back in your elementary school days—it seems to go against basic human nature, which tells us that getting even is the only thing that will make us feel any better. How easy it is to spread rumors about someone, tear apart a real or digital acquaintance on social media, cut off the next driver you in turn pass on the highway, or even curse someone out loud for something they've knowingly or unknowingly done to you.

But what does it accomplish for you, for your family, or for Christianity in general when you succumb to such thoughts or actions? Paul follows up with some tough advice in verses 16-18, and while it isn't always the first thing that comes to mind when we feel we've been wronged, I challenge you to make it part of your subconscious so that you'll be ready to live your Christian beliefs in full view of those who might least expect it:

"Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

May God's peace be with you as we FINALLY enter fully into the warmth, beauty, and new growth of spring.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Cory Germain