

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 18:15-20

"Not a Perfect World"

We only have to look around us and we can see that we do not live in a perfect world. In today's Holy Gospel Jesus gives us the prescription to heal broken relationships – but because of human nature – we have to deal with them in varying degrees and steps, but it all starts with communication. Jesus also reminds us that when we do gather and invite Him in – He will be in the midst of us. One of the key things that Jesus shows us is for us to be in community – *"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."* (Matthew 18:19-20) Did you catch those two words *"I am"*? He is telling us He is God, and He promises He will be with us. In the Old Testament He promised He would never leave us or forsake us. People want to know where God is in the midst of this storm? He is holding on to you! When you invite Him into the situation – *He is there in the midst of them*, and there is a sense of harmony.

The Apostle Paul in Romans 12 tells us that at the forefront of relationships must be love - but it needs to be genuine. There can be absolutely no 'lukewarm!' In Revelation chapter 3 Jesus warns about being 'lukewarm' and says as an example to the church at Laodicea *"So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth."* (Revelation 3:16) That is the nice way of saying it. I don't know about you but I don't want any part of any 'wishy washy – Lukewarm situation!' If it has got to do with God then I want to be hot. If it has got to do with good – then I want to be hot. This goes hand in hand with the message of today's Holy Gospel from Matthew – and the Epistle to the Romans in which Paul encourages us to *"Live in harmony with one another."* (Romans 12:16) If you have got a problem with a friend or a family member – time doesn't help if you let it simmer. Got them in love – and if that doesn't work – Jesus gives us the rest of the prescription – that is not just for the first century but it is for all time.

Every time Jesus met with His apostles, especially after He rose from the dead, offered them His "peace" – or "shalom" – showing an example of putting one's pride aside and on more than one occasion He told them, and He told us to not only love God – but to *"love your neighbor as yourself."* (Luke 10:27) In last week's sermon I asked:

- How can I love my neighbor when sometimes I don't even like him? If I really don't like someone, how can I love them?
- If I'm commanded to love them, and try to act as if I do, doesn't that make me a hypocrite?

Let me tell you, **ἀγάπη** "agape" or unconditional love takes thick skin and a whole lot of lot of patience. Isn't it amazing how we see people rise up to the occasion when confronted with a weekend like this which we are about to have. When you hear Walmart is closing today at 5 PM and it is going to be closed until Tuesday – do you know why? It is not to be mean – but they are caring for the people who work for them so that they can be with their families. This not a

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‘oh, this will pass-over storm’ - and it is time for us to rise to the occasion. For the second year in a row the people of this city and county have responded by providing shelter and meals for strangers – people that we don’t even know and we are recognizing their needs and responding. I have seen members of many different churches and civic organizations rise up and help to prepare and serve meals, help to set up over 1,500 cots in the Central Square Gym, donating food, snacks, blankets, diapers, hygiene products, supplies and even money. This is the kind of love that Paul is talking about – a genuine love.

During this past week, on your behalf, I have been privileged to see and experience the emergency preparedness of this community – attending EMA meetings, getting weather updates as well as plans from FEMA, GEMA, and all of the first responders in this community – Police and Fire as well as EMT, nurses, DFCS, local government, and churches – all ready to take care of the people in our community. Never was there a question of why – but instead discussions have always been how can we accomplish what we need to do to take care of our people – and those who have evacuated their homes and come to our county and city. How do we take care of them? Our Mayor of the city of Douglas wants everyone to know that through faith – we are going to be OK. These words from Paul I have seen in progress and will see in action during these next few days. Pastors from churches throughout our area from the Coffee County Ministerial Association are on a schedule of two hours in the shelter in case someone wants to pray or just talk. Listen to these words: *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”* (Romans 12:10-13) That is from today’s reading from Romans chapter 12. Hope can’t walk around with a mopey face. You cannot be Iors from Winnie the Pooh - you can’t be that way. If you have the joy of the Lord in you – show it! I know I am preaching to the choir here. You are people who care about each other.

As leaders in this community we need to round up that same feeling within our community – to help - however you can – volunteering to help in one of so many ways, and the biggest one is praying for those who have had to leave everything – sharing with God’s people who are in need – and maybe donating either food or financial support to the effort. The Red Cross is providing the bedding and supervising the food preparation. Legally you can’t bring a casserole because that cannot be served. The food has to be prepared under the watchful eye of supervision. It is federally required. The kitchens, which have been certified, over at First Baptist are being used to prepare all of the food. If you have canned peaches and you want to donate them – bring them over the First Baptist – they will use them, and they will gratefully say thank you! They are making three meals a day for the people who might seek shelter. Last night at about 1 o’clock in the morning – people were looking for snacks – and expecting something. I don’t know what it is like to be taken out of my home – not knowing what is going to be left – but we can try to help that.

Last year we all witnessed an amazing response by this community during Hurricane Matthew.

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When times like this come upon us it takes me immediately to Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats from Matthew 25:35-36 in which He says "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*" Whether we like how they look, or even if we don't like them – Jesus wants us to care for them. Paul speaks from his heart to us: "*On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.*" (Romans 12:20) It doesn't have to be at a shelter – it could be an elderly neighbor that might want to know that you care and looking out for them, or someone that you know who is alone and sure could use someone to check up on them, especially after the storm.

I have been in cities where there have been hurricanes, blizzards with feet of snow, and one thing we have in common is the human heart. In each of these incidents people have risen above their differences and instead have concentrated on overcoming the great need and tragedies that arose. I could tell you stories about people overlooking barriers of race, creed, public standing and more – and instead pulling together, working together and filling the needs that existed at the time. Amazingly going past differences and concentrating on fixing the problems together. We do not live in a perfect world but Paul encourages us to "*Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*" (Romans 12:16) It may not be a perfect world – but with God's help we can overcome any obstacle by working together, by God's grace.