

The Holy Trinity, Epistle, Year A

DOING WHAT WE CANNOT DO

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

The Holy Trinity

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

[Paul writes:] 11Finally, 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. 12Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

13The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Author's Note: You may want to take into consideration that the use of this text for Holy Trinity Sunday is an appropriation meant to highlight Trinitarian language. I will be working the text for its law-gospel preachability, not to explain the Trinity.

DIAGNOSIS: No Can Do

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Restoring Order
Paul was wondering whether the Corinthians had lost their center. It had happened before, when the Corinthians started to gravitate to certain ministry leaders like they were rock stars (see 1 Cor. 1:12 and 3:6), forgetting that it was the message (the good news about Christ) that was supposed to capture their attention, and not the person preaching it. Now things were “out of order” again. Some big-deal pastors had come into town with their 6-pack abs and designer jeans, and Paul couldn't seem to redirect the Corinthians' attention, despite his letter-long

plea.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Bad Order

Paul's concern was not just good order, it was the Corinthians' priorities. They were more enamored with the personality of their pastors than they were by the gospel. They were putting their trust in a cult of personality rather than the cult of Christus (an early designation for Jewish Christians). None of this would help the Corinthians to encourage one another or to live in peace. It could only distract and divide.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Out of Order

Distracted and divided—not only one member from another, but potentially all the Corinthian believers from God (the source of love, grace, and community). After all, whatever you fear, love and trust is your God, right? And the Corinthians were idolizing their pastors rather than loving God.

PROGNOSIS: Christ Can Do

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Out of Order

The kind of division the Corinthians were experiencing wasn't one that could be healed by a rousing appeal from a denim-clad preacher dude. No swagger or clever cultural reference would create unity for the Corinthians. And that's why Paul persists in appealing to the love of God, because without Jesus (God's love in the flesh), the Corinthians wouldn't have known how selfless, enduring, and long-suffering love could be. Without Christ crucified, the Corinthians could all too easily forget the God who bridges the divide through his own death and resurrection. Christ is undivided (1 Cor. 1:13). And his grace (v. 13) would heal the Corinthians' divide.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): New Order

So Paul calls the Corinthians to set their eyes on the cross, and the healing it provides for broken and misguided souls and

communities. To look upon Jesus—his suffering, death, and resurrection—because, while cool pastors come and go, the power of the cross will never be empty (1 Cor. 1:17). The Corinthians can depend on Christ to stay with them even when the lights go out and the curtains close.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Restoring Order
With all eyes on Christ, “the center holds” (see W. B. Yeats, *The Second Coming*). Love of God and love for community take priority over love for the rock-star pastor. And the less-shiny pastor is appreciated anew: She might be in Birkenstocks and a dirndl skirt, but boy can she get to the meat of the matter: If God’s love will endure death and the grave in Jesus, it most certainly can restore a fellowship that can provide us with a little glimpse of the kingdom.