

Title: The people in your life
Text: Titus 3.12-15
Theme: Life in the fellowship
Series: Titus
Prop Stmt: Your life in Christ is a life of fellowship with him and his people.

Read Text:

It should not surprise us that Paul concludes this letter to Titus talking about people. The letters of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are full of careful instruction about the church, but the church is comprised of people. So, when we gather on Sundays, WE gather. The church is not here throughout the week, like it is when we gather. Throughout the week, there is a building here, which provides a place to meet. But the meeting, the gathering, the church is the people. These practical matters of sending Artemas or Tychicus to take over for Titus so that Titus could meet Paul at Nicopolis along with the instructions about Apollos and Zenas only underscore the point that Paul was deeply involved in the lives of people. When Paul concludes the book of Romans, he references almost 30 people and writes something specific about most of them. These practical and personal instructions are a very fitting conclusion to this book full of instructions about the church. Therefore, in this final message from the Pastoral Epistles I want to remind you of one thing and motivate you to act on it. The one thing I want to remind you of is this: If you are a genuine follower of Christ, then your life in Christ is a life of fellowship with Christ and with his people. In fact, to the extent that you have fellowship with Christ will be seen in how you pursue fellowship and relationships with his people. This is what I want to motivate you to do. I want to motivate you to pursue deep friendships with one another so that you can help others and be helped by others to follow Jesus better. You will hear this theme echoed in the sermon because the sermon is a review of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus with a final point on the conclusion of Titus.

I. **The church is a people.**

So, to be technical and a bit more precise, you have not come to Cornerstone Baptist Church this morning because Cornerstone Baptist Church is actually not a place. You have come to the gathering of Cornerstone Baptist Church. We are a people. We gather in a place, but the place does not make us a church; Christ makes us a church. Christ did not die for a place; he died for a people. “*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*” (Eph 5.25). It is understandable that we feel a sense of connection with this building because of how many important moments in our lives have taken place in this space, but the space itself did not cause those moments to be important. God did and he involved people in those important moments.

This is particularly important for every single one of us, since we all tend to forget this and allow other views of the church to creep in. Many of you if not most of you are tempted to rate your satisfaction and assessment of the church based on the style of music. I can see why you would do that. Music affects us emotionally and we tend to place value on something that makes us feel a certain way. So, if I like a particular style

and the church does “my style” then I am tempted to think that this is the place for me or this is a good worship experience because my styles and preferences are validated. If I like to be awed by the transcendence of God, then worshiping in a cathedral type setting with a massive pipe organ that blows the wax out of my ears may be the experience I am looking for and when those deep sonorous tones resonate from the pipes and rumble the slate floor and high rafters, I am tempted to think, “now this is church.” On other hand, if I am feeling alone and vulnerable and I want to be comforted by the imminence of God, then worshiping in a more intimate setting with an acoustic guitar and box drum may give you the feeling you crave and finding that, you are tempted to think, “now this is really church.”

The same thing could be said about the architecture and interior design of the building. Gothic arches, stained glass windows, imposing and ornate features may intimidate you and make you feel awe as everything echoes. And when you feel awe, you feel like you are having a spiritual experience, whereas those same things may cause others of you to feel cold, distant, and lost. But, if I view the actual quality and value of the church based on something as fleeting and subjective as musical style or architectural design, please understand this: these things do not actually say anything good or bad about the church as much as it reveals ignorance on my part. The church is not primarily an event to be experienced or a building to be impressed by. The church is a people. Jesus did not die for a pipe organ, acoustic guitar, box drum or cool lighting effects. He died for people. So, when I think about going to church I need to think about gathering with a people. And I need to think about those people, the way Jesus thinks about them.

II. The church is a people who are in Christ.

When people think of the church as a building, it is easy to assume that because I attend there, and I feel a sense of connection to that place that I am part of that church. But that is not how the New Testament speaks of the church. The church is a people who belong to Christ, that is, they are in Christ. This is hugely important to understand because none of us are born as Christians. None of us! If you were baptized as an infant, you got wet. You were still a sinner. You just happened to be a sinner who got wet at church one time instead of only getting a bath at home or in your neighbor’s pool. There is no ceremony and certainly no water that can wash away your sin. Water can wash dirt off your skin, but it cannot wash the guilt off your conscience. You need something more powerful than water. Why is that? Because sin is more than things that you do that are wrong or things that you say that are wrong. Sin is the expression of rebellion against God. We are all born as rebels who hate anyone else telling us what to do or telling us what we cannot do especially God. This rebellious bent, this angle, this orientation, this fundamental disposition is rooted in my desire to rule my own life. I do not want God over me and in my natural condition of rebellion I live attempting to find meaning and significance by giving my life (worshiping) other things and other people, which is really a thinly veiled attempt at worshiping myself. So, I pursue education, popularity, pleasure, houses, cars, careers, clothes, body image, even a family in an attempt to find significance and show my ability to rule and reign. Looking to those things to provide me with meaning and hope is idolatry and those idols which look so promising are never satisfied and I will

waste my life and exhaust myself in pursuing them. My rejection of God's rule and my pursuit of my own rule provokes God's wrath against my sin and I am justly condemned for my rebellion even as I am frustrated at the fact that it does not work.

A Christian therefore is someone who sees that. He or she sees his sin for what it is and confesses it to God and instead of trusting in himself he or she repents of her sins and puts his faith in Christ because Christ lived a perfect life in our place and then died a sin-paying death in our place. When a person comes to faith in Christ, that person is no longer under the condemnation of God, but is declared righteous by God. Repentance from sin means to repent of my rebellion. Instead of attempting to sit on the throne of my life, I yield to God. My heart and life are his. Christ is not only my Savior; he is my Commander and King. He lived a life of perfect submission to the Father and therefore that is the path that I seek to follow.

But, there is more. When a person comes to faith in Christ, that person is not only reconciled to God, that person is reconciled to the other people who have also been reconciled to God. When you are reconciled to God, you become one of God's people. So when you are reconciled to God you are reconciled to the people of God. You are now in the family and part of the fellowship. It makes sense, doesn't it? When Adam sinned, he tried to throw God off the throne of his own heart and put himself on it. What does life look like when every person is attempting to sit on the throne of his or her life? It looks like this world where it is "*every man for himself.*" But when you come to faith in Christ, you get off the throne and give it back to the One who has the right to it and that is Christ. Therefore, what does life look like when every person is living with Christ on the throne of their heart? It is *every man for others*. Think about this. If Christ is on the throne of your heart, then Christ is going to be calling the shots – right? What would that look like? Shouldn't we expect Christ to direct us to do things that he did? Yes! And, what did he do? He served others. He cared for others. He invested his life in others. He prayed for others. He encouraged others. He spent time with others. Ultimately he died for others. Most of his public ministry was spent with 12 guys. A few days before his death, he spent the evening having dinner at the home of Simon, the leper. The night before he died, he spent the afternoon and evening observing the Passover with his disciples. He spent most of the day of his resurrection walking on a road that led to the town of Emmaus while he talked with two of his disciples and explained to them from Genesis to Malachi how the entire OT points to him. Christ pleased his Father because he focused so much on people. And the church, which is those people who have surrendered their lives to Christ are the body of Christ on earth. They are to be a people who instead of living for what they can get out of life, live to please God by serving others just like Christ.

Do you see why Jesus said that all of the law and the prophets could be summarized by saying that we are to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind and that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves? (Matthew 22.34-40)

Ephesians 2 tells us that all who in Christ are "*fellow citizens*" and "*members of God's household*" and that we are "*joined together*" into one holy temple. All of those expressions are different ways of saying how deeply united we are together. When you

come to faith in Christ, you are now in the family. You have a new name. You have been adopted. You have a seat at the table. You belong. You are known. You have a place. You are not an isolated cell; you are a member of the body. Whether a hand, a foot, an eye, or an ear, you are part of the body and you cannot ever say to the church or about the church, “*I do not need you*” or “*You do not need me*” because it is impossible to speak of fellowship with God through Christ without speaking about fellowship with God and the people of Christ. They all go together.

III. **The New Testament says a great deal about how we are to live together.**

This past year, we have been studying the books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus; the letters Paul wrote to two young men who were attempting to help churches under their influence live out their calling to be outposts of heaven on earth. We have read the things that Paul warns us of about regarding what tends to happen in churches and what the church needs to do. There is nothing about musical style, building style, glossy or flat printing of the bulletins, right? There is a lot about leadership. There is a lot about qualifications for leadership, how the church addresses and solves problems, and how the people are to be focused on serving one another. The more we care for one another, show interest in one another, encourage one another, prefer one another, listen to one another, help one another repent better and follow Jesus better, the more we will look like Jesus. And when we get off message, we get off mission.

So, the questions to ask about the church are not, do I like the music, or do I like the interior design and the feel of the space or anything else that is all about, what it does for me. The questions I ask should be more along the line of: are these people serious about following Jesus, can I help them follow Jesus better, will they help me follow Jesus better, is the gospel preached and believed by these people, is the church organized in such a way that helping her members follow Jesus well is a priority and emphasis? So, what have we learned from this past year in the pastorals?

A. **Every church has issues (1 Timothy 1.3)**

Every church is going to face problems from within and from without. What every church has to do is make up its mind as to how it is going to deal with them. Pretending that they do not exist does not work. Hoping that they will take care of themselves does not work. If you do not deal with them, they will deal with you. So, how do you deal with them? Paul wrote the first letter to Timothy because there were problems in the church at Ephesus that had to be confronted and rooted out.

Beloved, here is what often happens. Some people aspire to positions of leadership in the church to fill their own emptiness and massage their own egos and in some cases become pastors. People like that attempt to use people, manipulate people and are constantly getting their feelings hurt. As a member of this church, my focus is to be on how I can care for you, NOT on how affirmed you make me feel. If I “serve” you in order to feel affirmed, then, who am I actually serving? Myself! If my true goal is to feel affirmed and validated, then what will my attitude be when I don’t get that affirmation or validation? I

will get my feelings hurt, right? If I am constantly getting my feelings hurt, it may be because I am not actually serving Christ and others, but am serving myself.

Well, the truth is, we all struggle with that. And we need to know that and be sensitive to that about one another and help one another with that. Because we all struggle with stuff, and some more than others, issues are going to come up. We are sinners. While the church is supposed to be a taste of heaven, it is not heaven. We are not there, yet.

B. Dealing with problems is hard. (2 Timothy)

Helping people face the truth about themselves is challenging and exhausting and it never ends. We are called to love deep, but when we love deep, we risk being hurt deep and we will be hurt deep. That is part of what it means to know the heart of Christ. When people that I have cared for, and served, and have had in my home and have prayed with and ate with and have provided them a place to stay and they go out and blow up their lives, I feel it deep. I lose some wind in my sails. I lose some bounce in my step and my smiles become forced. Disappointments take their toll. Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy to encourage Timothy to keep at it in spite of the opposition that he faced and will continue to face. We have learned that from these letters. Because the church is people, our biggest problems are people problems and dealing with them is hard.

A few of you have been here as long as or longer than me and Cathi. Most of you have joined us somewhere along the trip. Therefore, most of you know that there have been plenty of times when we have all gone through times of loss, and not just people who have died, but people who have gone sideways. But, fighting through it, and pressing on has forged our bonds, even as it has softened our hearts. We are a more tender fellowship for it. And so while we have experienced some deep sorrows together, our joys are even deeper. To watch these young lives professing faith in Christ and get baptized this morning is beyond words. You could give me a million dollars toward our debt and it wouldn't be as thrilling as this has been today. (By the way, if you were planning on doing that, it would still be good).

Some of you have chosen to keep your distance because you want to control who and what gets close to your heart. You don't want to risk being hurt or being hurt again. Do you know why you do that? You do that because you consider yourself to be more important than others. I need to lean hard on you because you consider protecting your feelings as being more important than your obedience to Christ. So, yes, you may protect your heart from the hurts, but you rob your soul of the joys.

C. Qualified leadership is a must! (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1)

God has established the office of an elder for the leadership of the church. While a church may only have one qualified elder in the early days of her existence, the plan is for a church to have a plurality of elders. There is so much wisdom and so much to commend to this model of leadership. While the congregation is the final court of appeals, according to Matthew 18 and 1 Cor. 5, the congregation is to be led by men who function

as shepherds to the flock. These men, who may or may not have their salaries paid by the congregation are qualified because of personal character, leadership in their homes, reputation in all areas, theological knowledge, consistent track record, and possess the ability to teach the Word.

In addition to elders, each church is to have deacons and deaconesses. These are men and women who carry out the many practical needs of the congregation by taking care of matters that are both people oriented, and administratively focused so that others are free to be more people oriented. One of the takeaways for the Elders from this series is that while we have attempted to make you more aware of whom the elders are, we need to do a better job of letting you know who the deacons and deaconesses are. Since we believe that every position is as important as the other and that all work together for the health of the body, it is good for you to know who is doing what so that you can thank God for them, encourage them and in many cases, be prepared to serve like them.

D. Caring for others is a must!

When you put all of this together you get a pretty accurate view of the real life of a church. The real life of a church is raw, real and daily. And while I am often in a position where I need to challenge you, I want to commend you. Sure, there are some of you who could really do a much better job of connecting with others, but, there are many of you who take this to heart and it shows.

As you can tell from this text, we are to look at our lives and ask the question, “how can I leverage the things God has given me, the skills God has given me, the opportunities God has given me, and the time God has given me to help love others and help them follow Jesus better?” How can I use my house or apartment to serve others? How can I use my car to serve others? How can I use my truck, my talents, my ability to cook, etc?

Let me give you some examples from this week: A couple in our church is moving closer to the church so they can invite more people over to their home after church in order to eat together. Another couple opened up their home to another member who needs a place to stay for a few weeks. Other members are providing meals for people who are recovering from hospital stays, while others visit and pray with those who are now not able to get out of their homes. It just happens. There is no master organization that controls all of this; it is organic. Many of you literally look for ways to have people over to your homes. You host high school events or college events. Some of you deliberately do not plan anything after church so that you can meet someone new and eat with them. And as I get wind of these things, I am so humbled and so overwhelmed.

Two weeks ago a family from our church had to leave because his job was transferred to another state. They appreciate our services, the music, the preaching, but they cried over the fact that they will miss the relationships. As you have heard me say dozens of times, every congregation has a choice. We can be a bag of marbles or bag of grapes.

E. Church polity is important.

The organizational structure of the church is not as important as the gospel, but God has given instructions for the polity in order to protect the gospel, by putting into leadership men who know the gospel, whose lives are clearly and consistently influenced by the gospel, and who seek to grow in their knowledge and application of it. I would rather join a church that has poor organization with godly and humble leaders than efficient organization with ungodly and unqualified leaders. But, we shouldn't have to choose between the two. Pay attention to the polity. Fulfill your promise as a member. Inform yourself on what is going on in your church. Attend the members' meetings. Yes, parts of them can be boring, but if we do not have boring meetings then we will set ourselves up for problems. Do your part to be knowledgeable about who is in leadership and what they are doing in order to:

- 1) to protect the gospel
- 2) to promote unity
- 3) to facilitate people caring for one another
- 4) to advance the gospel

IV. **Putting it all together.** (Titus 3.12-15)

Because of our love for God, the gospel and the church, we are to be a:

A. **People who serve one another** (12)

Artemas or Tychicus are going to go to Crete to relieve Titus. These brothers are willing, available and qualified because they have been trained and because they want to serve. Neither Titus nor Paul are doing this heavy lifting all alone.

B. **People who sacrifice for one another** (13)

Apollos and Zenas have served the churches well and need to move on. The believers need to help them so that they have the monies and provisions to get to their next assignment and ministry. Paul rightly assumes that believers look for ways to be generous so the ministry of the gospel is always being advanced. Being generous is what we do, because it is who we are because we have been rescued by the generous grace of God.

C. **People who prepare to serve one another** (14)

I love v.14. It basically summarizes the book and provides a great framework for the church. When you serve other people, you are vulnerable to being abused. There will be people who will attempt to take advantage of your generosity and will try to take and take and take and take. Do you see the wisdom and the challenge of v.14? Every single one of us is to do all that we can in order to get ourselves into a position where we can provide

resources and help cases of urgent need. If you are helping someone, praise God! Help them so that they can get into a position where they can help others. If you are being helped, thank God! Thank God and realize that God has invested resources in you for you to use in order to help you work hard and get to the place where you can be the one giving to others.

D. People who love one another (15)

Every congregation has a choice. We can be a bag of marbles or a bag of grapes...

On a scale of 1-10 with a 1 being a marble and a 10 being a grape, where would you rate yourself? Here is your homework, ready?

1. Rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 (marble to grape)
2. Ask 2 or 3 other people who know you to rate you.
3. Come up with at least 1 thing you can do (and keep on doing) that will help you move more towards ("grapeness")