

Let's Have More in Common

1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷ *The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.* ⁸ *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.* ⁹ *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.* ¹⁰ *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.* ¹¹ *If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

Have you ever heard of a herd mentality? When one animal flinches or darts from danger, the rest instinctively do the same and follow. It looks like the whole herd moves as one. That's herd mentality. It applies to varieties of herds, flocks, schools of fish, and swarms of bugs. On the other end of the spectrum are your solitary predators, your lone wolves, as we say: grizzly bears, bald eagles, and great white sharks.

What animal type is used in the Bible to describe God's people? We are one flock. *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom"* (Luke 12:32). Now why do you think God's people would be called a flock? It's not about safety in numbers. It's not about being stronger together. It's much better than that. Today God urges us toward a greater community. We will explore that with the encouragement: "Let's have more in common!"

We all recognize how communities were impacted by the pandemic six years ago. Many congregations are still far below pre-COVID attendance averages. One can talk about people's use or overuse of their phones these days. I'm not saying that technology itself is pure evil. But might it contribute to the loneliness some feel in a crowded room?

God has an idea for us today. It's a really big idea. Through Peter's encouragement and teaching, God is pushing us further from the lone wolf side. We find enjoyment in being one flock as the people of God.

Peter helps us get in the right frame of mind for a greater community with these words: *"The end of all things is near."* Think about what that brings. Jesus could come back anytime! Our Savior has completed his work of saving the world from sin and conquering death and hell. At any time Jesus can come again to bring us into the fulness of the life he won for us. So we have to get over the idea that 2,000 years have passed since Jesus died and rose again. Biblical thinking doesn't say, "God is slow." Biblical thinking says, "The end of all things is near!"

How does that shape the way we think? The day is coming when we will stand before God! What will that mean for you and me? What do we look forward to? What don't we want to happen? Our Christian faith soars to shout, "I want to see you rejoicing with Jesus, knowing the hope that God has given this poor dying world. Help people see and know God their Savior in Christ!"

That's why Peter says to wake up, to be sober and alert. Don't get entangled in false priorities and slavish sins. Know what the priority is. It's happening right here!

What is more, Peter helps us identify three key ingredients to being a clearheaded community: love, hospitality, and service.

Peter writes: *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.* Noah got off the ark after the flood. Before too long he planted a vineyard. Eventually he made wine. Sadly he got drunk and passed out in his tent. He laid there exposed. What a mess! Here's what happened next. Ham, one of Noah's three sons, was first on the scene to witness his father's embarrassment and shame. He thought it was funny.

Ham told his brothers, and do you know what they did? Shem and Japheth took their father's robe at the entrance to the tent. They put it around their shoulders together as they walked in backwards. They laid the garment down over their father without ever seeing him. They did all they could to cover up their father's sin. They did this for their own hearts and for their father's reputation.

You can keep a record of wrongs. You can explore and investigate to make sure every nasty detail has a receipt to go with it. You can improve your ammunition for the next argument. Or does the great day of the Lord encourage you to grab a garment and do all you can to cover up the sin? Because we're family, his family. We're his flock, one flock. And you do all you can not to hold a sin against someone.

Sure, others will have a tender and gentle conversation with the Father. They know we're not the family that always gets it right, always takes the high road, is perfectly polished pieces of work. We're dinged and damaged goods. Only God's love still holds on to that and covers it up.

Let's have more in common. Let deep love keep us together! If you've ever thought of taking something with you to the grave, someone already did. If you think of having sins that will never be exposed, always covered, that's true for you because of Jesus. In Jesus, we have a day of the Lord that comes where he's not going to get out a list and say, "All right, your turn. Everybody listen. This is what we got on you. What do you think?"

That day will never come because Jesus embraced our sins as his own. He sipped every last drop of drunkenness. He took the blame for every shameful sin. He was himself exposed fully to our punishment under God. Can you believe he did this for us?

Peter says, "You want to be his flock...even to the end? Love each other deeply, for love covers a multitude of sins." Greet one another with the forgiveness our Savior won us and keeps our community together to that final day.

Peter continues: *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.* The Odyssey was written about 700 BC. In book 6 of Homer's epic poem, Odysseus is wandering around and struggling mightily as he arrived in a newland. He doesn't have any clothes. He's starving. He's a total stranger to this part of the world. But nearby a maiden and a few others are playing ball together. The maiden is the daughter of a prominent local. Her dad was a man upon whom the community itself depended. Odysseus shows up and presents his great need and asks for help. And the maiden shines with hospitality. She supplies him with clothes, food and drink and a proper bath.

This is an ancient text with such thoughtful hospitality! How much more do we think of hospitality? God has been cultivating our minds to be aware of so many needs besides clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home? Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. With hospitality, you are giving away what you won't get back, whether time, or energy or resources. The more creative you are with hospitality, the more it costs you. And for Peter, that's the best part. "Do it without grumbling," he says.

Maybe you've had cancer or know someone who has. Maybe you've had a miscarriage or been through a divorce. Maybe you've gotten an F or know what it's like to be excluded from a circle of friends. Maybe you've lost a loved one or are really struggling personally right now. Vulnerable relationships can become some of the deepest ones you enjoy.

Let's have more in common! Let's be better hosts for one another. We can be a flock filled with support and care. We can say, "Let me handle that job so you can get a break. Let me pick up the kids from school or watch your cat or mow your lawn so you can be where you need to be."

At the same time, if you're struggling, tell someone! We all get stressed and suffer vulnerable times. Let's fall into one another's lives in ways where we get to be together and stay together by practicing rich expressions of hospitality.

Peter continues: *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.* Maybe now you're thinking this is where we go our separate ways. We're different. We have different gifts, so we'll do different things.

But God has a completely opposite view. Our different gifts enable us to depend on each other and bless each other uniquely. God has arranged it so that this community is a flock where you need one another. He intentionally did not give us duplicate gifts. He wants to put us all in the same community to share ourselves. You are the greatest gift you give to this congregation.

If you consider church as just showing up—come in and then go—you'll never enjoy all the gifts God has given to you in his flock. Plus, you're stealing from the pool of resources God wants you to use to bless others.

This is a testimony of God's grace to each of us. What a grace that God would say, "You're not unnecessary. In fact, I'm building this to be the opposite. I'm building you to be a flock with diversified gifts so that you intentionally get together and serve one another.

Has the herd mentality got you yet? Imagine the horrible alternative. Imagine being cut off from everyone by glass walls. You see others—with sin, shame, needs, and cares—all happening in front of you without a thing you can do about it. It doesn't matter the heart you have to cover up sin or the gifts you have to serve. You don't get to leave your glass box. And that is what our sins deserve: to be cut off completely and stuck alone.

Our Lord Jesus Christ took on flesh to save us. He took on sin to break every barrier down. He didn't do this for himself but for you. You may now enter the scene and use your gifts to cover and to help and serve and support. Jesus turns his sheep loose with shepherd skills in their hearts for one another. Lord, prepare your people! Keep us ready for your great day! Brothers and sisters, let's have more in common.