

# “Everybody Get Together, Try to Love One Another”

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher  
Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio  
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- John 13:34-35 <sup>34</sup> And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”
- Colossians 3:12-17 <sup>14</sup> And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity.
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: “Loving one another” is not always in our human nature, but it’s in Christ’s nature which we strive to adopt.

As always, after a vacation it’s nice to be home. But this year it was also great to actually get away for a vacation. Last year we were sort of grounded by our son’s chemo treatments. The year before Mary’s hip replacement had us staying close to home. But this year we were really able to “get outta town” on an Alaskan cruise that my wife *won* in a raffle last winter at her professional conference. I was delighted that she selected me to join her!

The cruise through Alaska’s Inside Passage was delightful, restful, delicious, scenic, and victorious (we won the Broadway musical trivia contest in *Sudden Death*). One of the reasons the cruise was so restful was that both of us were electronically disconnected. Even though most of our time sailing was within U.S. territorial waters, we were beyond the reach of cellular towers. And we elected not to purchase the ship’s unlimited wireless internet package for \$229 for the week... per device. So except for the brief times in-port, no internet, no cell phone, no texts, no Facebook. Aaaah!

You see, we left town midway through the RNC, and we boarded the ship about a week later right after Philadelphia’s Democratic convention, so we’d heard the speeches and accusations, the points and counterpoints, the negative ads being spewed through televisions and radios and newspapers from every conceivable political action committee. We were as sick as anyone of the rhetoric and posturing.

...And then we boarded the ship. A ship with nearly 3,000 passengers, most from the United States. With the exception of an occasional “Make America Great Again” ballcap or a “I’m With Her” t-shirt, the passengers on the ship were not anxious to create a divide amongst themselves. There were no accusations against the crew coming from passengers on the “far-port” or “far-starboard.” Peoples’ focus was on enjoying being together, enjoying a shared experience, enjoying *two* desserts at dinner if you wanted to.

It reminded me of this reality: three-thousand people on a ship or 350 million people in a country can choose their attitude.

Two young women demonstrated that last week at the Olympic Summer Games in Rio. On NBC Nightly News this week I saw the story of the spontaneous moment of *détente* between gymnasts from a bitterly and tragically divided country – North and South Korea. Seventeen-year-old Lee Eun-Ju of South Korea and twenty-seven-year-old Hong Un Jong of North Korea brushed aside the political differences of their respective governments and snapped a selfie,

young Eun-Ju forming a peace sign with her fingers as a visual caption of hope for their photo. They could have glared at each other. They could have muttered or shouted taunts at each other. They could have ignored each other. Instead, they chose to take a small but meaningful step toward bridging the dividing line that separates them from each other.

That photo brought to mind a song from fifty years ago that was only a modest hit when recorded by the Kingston Trio and then The Youngbloods. In fact, the Youngbloods' version gained its highest rank, Number 5 on Billboard's Hot 100 chart a few years *after* they released it. That was when it "was used in a radio public service announcement as a call for brotherhood by the National Conference of Christians and Jews." The song's familiar refrain urged,

Come on people now  
Smile on your brother  
Everybody get together  
Try to love one another  
Right now<sup>1</sup>

We may sense that trying "to love one another" feels more difficult than usual "right now." Our country seems on edge.

- There's such an accusatory mood that asserts "If-you-don't-agree-with-me-then-obviously-you're-wrong-and-not-to-be-respected."
- Black Lives Matter, yes. And Blue Lives Matter, yes. *And All Lives Matter...* yes!
- And Refugees are people, not political pawns or economic burdens or security threats or diluters of culture and purity.
- Firearms are things – for some they are tools, or equipment for sport, and at the very least marvels of design and engineering to be appreciated and admired... but firearms are things, and if we worship things the Bible calls that idolatry because an idol occupies the place of the Living God. There's much passion in our nation over matters of access and use of firearms – passion that challenges our ability "to love one another."

In the realm of presidential candidates, maybe you've made up your mind. Maybe you've resolved not to participate. Maybe you're still deciding your preference among Republican Donald Trump or Democrat Hilary Clinton, or Green Party candidate Jill Stein, or Libertarian Party candidate Gary Johnson. How do you still "love one another" when you know that the candidate preferred by your friend, your neighbor, your child, your spouse is someone other than your own?

How do we smile on our sister or brother? How does everybody get together, to try to love one another?

It's against our nature. It's against human nature. It requires the strength of our spiritual nature. That spiritual nature was described in Colossians Chapter 3 beginning with the reminder we can never hear too frequently – that we belong to God: "You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own."<sup>2</sup> The scripture's author then uses metaphors of clothing to describe how we are to wrap, to envelop, to immerse ourselves in the spiritual power that we receive through our trust in God: "So, then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." Each day you decide how to clothe

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<sup>1</sup> "(Let's) Get Together" words and music by Chet Powers (a.k.a. Dino Valenti), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Get\\_Together\\_\(The\\_Youngbloods\\_song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Get_Together_(The_Youngbloods_song)), accessed 8/11/2016.

<sup>2</sup> Col. 3:12a Good News translation

yourself; each day you decide how people are going to see you. Similarly, every moment of every hour of every day we decide whether we are going to choose kindness as our default way of relating to others. We choose whether we will express compassion for the situations that others are facing. Will we be patient when it might feel momentarily self-satisfying to explode in self-righteous indignation at some perceived slight or inconvenience? Will we puff ourselves up with pride and ego as a way of putting others in their place, or will we choose an attitude of humility that acknowledges the right of every individual to be treated with respect?

Five years ago our college friend Jane suffered the tragic loss of her twenty-year-old college student son. A month after the funeral she and her husband went to Kent State to retrieve their son Mick's personal belongings. Jane shared that Mick had a favorite saying: "ELE" which meant "Everybody Love Everybody!" She said that Mick had written "ELE" all over his school papers, all over drawings he made (especially drawing of golf carts which he liked to design), even all over a stash of coloring books he kept.

"ELE" .... "Everybody Love Everybody." Isn't that what Jesus encouraged – no, not encouraged... what Jesus *commanded*? "And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Everybody love everybody.

- Public, love the police who protect you, and police, love the public who you are sworn to serve.
- Sports fans, love the people who support the team competing against yours.
- Presbyterians, love the Lutherans and Catholics and Methodists and others; love the Jews and Hindus and Muslims and others;
- Electorate, in humility show Christ-like love for the candidates and the people who support them, even if you disagree with their politics or past or policies or promises.

Everybody love everybody.

You might argue, "Sorry, it's not in my nature." I agree. It's *not* in *our* nature. But it is in Christ's nature, and as his followers, we pray that we will be infused with his nature and empowered by his spirit to do what does not come naturally to us. Jesus promises us that it's possible for "everybody to love everybody": "As I have loved you, [he said,] so you must love one another." Or, if he were to put it another way, "Everybody get together, try it: love one another... right now."