2 Corinthians 13:11-14 11Finally, brothers, rejoice. Set things in order. Be encouraged. Agree with one another. Be at peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. 12Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13All the saints greet you. 14The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

It is a most difficult situation, isn’t it? In this case I am talking about all the things that are going on currently, and I will admit they are scary things. What things? Well, let’s just take the Covid-19 thing.

We have this new virus that we don’t know much about. So our government on both the Federal and State levels made the determination to do something that hadn’t been done since the 1920’s with the Spanish flu, they kind of shut down the country. Now in truth, during the 1920’s that was an act that had fewer repercussions simply because America was still very much a farming and rural country. Most families were actually pretty self-sufficient. The places that felt the impact the worst were the cities where factory jobs came to a halt and where they weren’t used to providing their own food, nor did they have the ease of resources that rural America had. Times were just different.

But this time the “stay at home orders” had a tremendous impact. Our economy has been deeply impacted. The health and well-being of people and businesses is an absolute problem and for many there may not be a recovery. Was this a political game? Was this all made up?

That’s the other big problem that is out there in this situation. Because of social media, because of instantaneous news and instantaneous opinions from everyone we are much more confused about what to believe and not believe. So in truth this Covid-19 has divided the country in ways that no one has seen before or fully understands. We all became experts, depending on what we read and believed.

Here my best, my best observation. Is the pandemic real? I would say, “Yes.” The reason I would say that is fairly simple, one set of facts that I learned. Covid-19 caused 100,000 deaths from February to May. That’s 4 months. Typically the flu kills 130 to 160,000 every year, but that’s 12 months! So in one-third of the time, Covid-19 was at 100,000! That’s pretty deadly. So I do believe that what was done saved lives and gave us time to be able to efficiently deal with this virus. That’s why the death rate percentage is so low, we gave ourselves time to figure out what to do. And yet, as time has gone on it is also clear that Covid-19 has become a political football. Just watch the political advertising going on and you will know that. Again, that is my best observation and deduction, and even in that I may be absolutely wrong.

The next and right now the prevalent issue is that of the protests on behalf of George Floyd and also the looting, rioting and destruction that underlying fringe groups have engaged in all in the name of protest. The issue of George Floyd’s death is tragic as is the death of any person who is unjustly taken from this world. Do I want to see our laws administered in a more just and righteous way? Absolutely! I want fairness in our Country for everyone regardless of race, creed or sexual orientation. But at the same time I do not want lawlessness. I want us to be a nation of laws, fair laws that we adhere to. I believe our Constitution, both Federal and State are great foundation documents that are fairly and unbiasedly written. So let’s, as God’s children and as United States citizens learn to listen, care and be a help for the issue of fairness in our laws. I don’t believe the anarchists who are active right now have that goal or agenda.

That then brings us to the words of our text for this day. In truth, the words of our text open us up to the discussions and thoughts I shared with you in my introduction. In truth, any of you who has paid attention could attest to the fact that rarely does Pastor Balogh wax philosophical or political in his sermons because he would rather just preach Christ and him crucified for our sins to be our Savior. But is clear that our words, if looked at, lead us to consider our world and its relation to Christ. And of course, it is the absence of that marvel of Christ that most deeply impacts our world and us. Our theme: **HOW TO: DIRECTIONS FOR LOVE AND PEACE.**

Now you have to be aware that the words before us are the concluding words of this Epistle that Paul has written. There were some difficult things dealt with in both of the Corinthian letters. It is true that by the second letter the Corinthians were for the most part repentant of their lax faith, yet there are still some things that need to be addressed and corrected. To close this letter of evangelical admonishment Paul clearly wishes to encourage and to draw our attention to the grace and mercy of God. Let’s look at his words, line by line.

Verse 11: **Finally, brothers, rejoice.** There are those who would argue that the word used here, which would normally be translated “rejoice” is actually being used as a word of farewell. That’s why if you look in your NIV Bible you will see this translation, **“Finally, brothers, good-bye.”** While it is true that a form of this word is used as an opening greeting, there is just not good evidence of it being used as a farewell greeting. So I like the “rejoice” that our EHV uses. Here is Paul’s, or should I say the Holy Spirit’s encouragement for us to rejoice. Be a happy, joy filled people, is the force here. And yes, this word is an imperative, that voice of command or encouragement. Be joyful. And why not? Consider the grace and mercy of God found in Jesus and then ask, “What is there in this world that could shake this joy from us?” So even in this opening phrase we find our thoughts directed to our current situation and we hear the Lord say to us here: “Hey, my Children, it’s true, things seem a bit fearful and tenuous, but remember you have me. I the Lord your God, your Savior and Shepherd, I am with you and I will protect you for your eternal good.” With that in mind, rejoice because you are in the hands of the Lord.

Phrase 2: **“Set things in order.”** I will tell you this is a very interesting word. It is used 13 times in the New Testament and is given 13 different nuances of meaning. In this context, since Paul has spent time admonishing and calling for repentance it is fitting to look at this word as a further, but gentler call to repentance, here translated as “set things in order.” On the strictly human side it would mean we are to get out lives settled down, to get things working smooth and orderly for the good of all. On the spiritual side, this word would be a call to “get right with the Lord.” We do that by true repentance that not only sees the wrongs we do but also incites that we as God’s children work to stop those wrongs. All of this is because of God’s awesome mercy and grace. If God can set us right in his sight because of Jesus, then surely we can work to get things right and proper in our lives too. The application to today’s dealings I think is so obvious they don’t need to be mentioned. Yes, let’s get things set in order, an order pleasing to God in every way.

Next is **“Be encouraged.”** Just like the last two verbs this one is also an imperative, that word of command or encouragement. Isn’t that awesome, the word encourage in the verb voice that is meant to encourage! Get the feeling God is serious about this? God wants us to have a good outlook, a good attitude and positive view of things. Don’t speak words that tear down, rather speak words that build up and strengthen. Seriously folks, we have God on our side. He is in control. He is working for our eternal good and salvation. And yes, I believe God has purpose and direction in all the things going on now. Are you going to let these temporary worldly things bog you down or are you going to stay encouraged knowing that God is with you and taking care of you in every way? Since God has forgiven your sin and granted you eternal life and salvation why not “be encouraged.” I think here is the Holy Spirit’s way of saying to each of us, “Fear not, it’s going to be alright, it is all going to be alright.”

The next one is, **“Agree with one another.”** Here is a great phrase that we need to take to heart in this world of ours. Work at harmony among yourselves. What you want for you, wish for the other guy too! God is calling for harmony among ourselves. Certainly this harmony is called for in the Church. Not a fake harmony, but an agreement on the wonder and marvel of God’s Word and the beautiful message it gives us. On the world stage, again to come to grips with the need for fair justice, equitable laws and the practice of recognizing that every human is really a member of your family. In our entire universe, we are it and we need to treat each other with care, compassion and understanding.

Next, **“Be at peace.”** To me, this is the most important one. Peace. I don’t think of peace without thinking about what Jesus is about, namely granting peace with God because my sins have been forgiven through Jesus. That’s where all peace starts. And I can and do apply this peace to my world. Covid? I am at peace with it. If that is how God wants to call me home or if that is what God knows I need for my eternal good, I am at peace. Struggles, tight finances, ups and downs, and the world afire? It is in the hands of God, who has demonstrated his love in Jesus and who tells me no matter what He is with me, guarding and protecting my soul for eternal life and salvation. And because of that there is a peace in my heart. I trust God’s promises, lean on his understanding, cast my anxieties his way, walk in the valley of the shadow of death…and I am at peace. God’s peace. Eternal peace in Jesus.

And here comes a sentence that I think is really just an extension of **“Be at peace.”** We read, **“And the God of love and peace will be with you.”** All of these things work for the good of our lives. All of these things help to focus us on Jesus and his gracious redemption on the cross. All of these things are ours because they are backed by and provided by God, the true God whose desire for us is that we know his love and peace. Love in Jesus. Peace in Jesus. But just as important note how the future tense keeps putting before us the fact that He will, WILL be with us and all of these things will be ours too!

The next phrase is kind of disputed, not for what it says, but for where it is to be placed. Is this phrase further encouragements or is this phrase a part of the next level of signing off for Paul. Me, I think it actually belongs with all the other phrases, because this too is still an imperative. Here is our last word of encouragement for our souls and lives. It says, **“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”** I can’t think of anything that promotes or fosters feelings of kindness, care and compassion as readily as the way we greet and meet with each other. If I greet you with a punch in the nose, that is certainly going to set a tone for the entire visit. God wants us to greet with affection, in this case a kiss, a holy kiss. What is a holy kiss? One that is delivered because you are a fellow child of God and heir of eternal life. A kiss that acknowledges that we are brothers and sisters in the Lord because of the grace and mercy given in Jesus. And seriously, it doesn’t have to be a kiss…how about a hug, that warm and intended handshake, or in today’s Covid conscious world, that firm but meaningful elbow bump. In other words, express openly your care and concern for each other as you deal with each other and work to show God’s grace in your lives. The holy kiss is the tone setter as we come together or as we depart.

Now comes the change in what is said. It’s as if Paul just throws this next phrase in as a way of trying to wrap things up, but it is more than that. He says, **“All the saints greet you.”** Not just empty words, but words reminding us that we are united in Christ with every single member of the Holy Christian Church. We think of them. We rejoice with them. We pray for them. We walk with them. And they in turn feel the same way toward us in Christ.

Now, is the final sentence, what we know as the Apostolic blessing. **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”** Notice the Trinitarian format: Son, Father, and Holy Spirit. Not because they are three but because they are one and bring all the blessings mentioned here upon us. Jesus is what grace is about. God the Father is the very heart and core of love. And binding all of this together is the Holy Spirit. God, our God, working for us in every way because of what He is.

Well, I know we kind of rushed, especially the last phrase, that blessing, but if you go back and reread all that was said you will grasp that it is all just emphasizing what we have in our awesome and wonderful God. He loves us. He showers his grace on us. He calls us to be his. May all these words be true in your life! Amen.