

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
TWELVTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
CHOOSING TO SUBMIT  
John 6:59-69  
August 23, 2009  
10:00 A.M. SERVICE**

Faith means living in covenant with God. Faith in God makes other kinds of faith possible. Faith in other people, like faith in ourselves, makes life fulfilling. When we live by faith, no problem is beyond resolution, and no dream is beyond realization. Faith in God helps us to live by faith. I pray that God would grant us all such faith.

Jesus reached a point in his ministry where he drew a line in the sand. Only those followers who were willing to commit themselves wholeheartedly to his service were eligible to be his disciples. Many found his demands too costly and no longer followed him. Some stayed with him because they knew that he alone had the words of eternal life.

Some people think that life would be easier if we had a set of rules that covered every situation and decision. Growing, however, is a process of living more in terms of relationships than rules. Mature love involves trusting and being trustworthy. A commitment of love between two persons is better than any set of rules.

Submissiveness is not exactly a virtue these days. In fact, no one wants to be submissive to anyone - - in marriage, in the workplace, in schools, on the streets. This is no surprise to Americans. The ideal of democracy has permeated everything. The old social categories of class and rank are no longer acknowledged, even where they still exist! All are equal, and we have rejected submissiveness along with horse-drawn carriages and top hats. But have we lost something in the process?

It has been frequently observed that the loneliest of numbers is one. It was a critical moment in creation when God said, "*It is not good that the*

*man should be alone.*” This indicates something basic in our nature, the need for another person. It is the need for human relatedness, which cannot be met either by the lower creatures or by God. Without it, the human heart becomes, according to Fiona Macleod, “**a lonely hunter.**” When we have fulfilling human relationships, being alone can be the nurturing experience of solitude. But when we are bereft of human relatedness, being alone can overwhelm us with loneliness. “**Alone, alone, all alone, /Alone on a wide, wide sea!**” (Coleridge)

As necessary as human relatedness is, it is also filled with risks. A relationship can bring you life’s greatest joy or its worst pain. The death of Charles Shultz has not diminished the popularity of “**Peanuts.**” There are a lot of human traits in the “**Peanuts**” characters and we identify with them. Charlie Brown personifies the joyful yearning for a special relationship and the painful experience of unrequited love. It is not good to be alone, but it is devastating to be rejected or betrayed.

Jesus’ experience of rejection and betrayal did not begin with Judas. Today’s lesson from John’s Gospel is a case in point. Jesus has been explaining to his followers that his life is “*heavenly bread,*” saying, “***He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.***” Many of these people say, “***This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?***” And they stop following him. Jesus asks the Twelve, “***Will you also go away?***” Peter answers, “***To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.***” Yet on the night he was betrayed by Judas, they all abandoned him and fled.

Our soaring divorce rates and our cultural instability cause apprehension in many who are considering marriage. Human relatedness is important, but are the odds against us? Are rejection and betrayal inevitable in relationships? As old as it is, the Bible is filled with disastrous marriages and dysfunctional families. Read the Bible, and see for yourself! Even in the first churches you can find essentially all the same relational problems that we encounter today. The Apostle Paul had to do marital counseling in some of his letters, and even gave the congregations advice on how to handle troublesome members. Paul’s counsel deserves our consideration.

In his letter to Ephesus, Paul says that marriage is the most precious of human relationships, akin to the relationship of Christ with his church. Still, Paul’s advice reflects the patriarchal, male-dominated world in which he lived. Legal rights in Palestine were heavily weighted on the side of the

husband, and women had essentially no legal protection at all. Therefore, we are not surprised to read the injunction, ***“Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord.”*** Here many readers dismiss Paul’s instructions as irrelevant. For one thing, however, Paul wants to protect the wives, who would be in great danger if they broke with the accepted pattern. For instance, the punishment for adultery was death for a wife, but a husband was given a pass. Paul’s overarching admonition is at the beginning of the passage: ***“Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ.” (5:21)***

Paul says husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves his church, and as they love themselves. There is no domination-and-submission pattern being proposed, but a mutual submissiveness. This is where Paul begins and ends in this passage. Christians are to be mutually submissive. Mutual submissiveness among Christians, then, lays the foundation for a mutually submissive marriage relationship.

Submissiveness is a choice. Submissiveness should never be a rule, but always a choice. There is no iron-clad system that requires submissiveness on the part of one but not the other. Submissiveness, in a relationship, is an expression of love.

God only knows all the reasons why some relationships succeed and others fail. There are as many different reasons as there are relationships. Dr. L. D. Johnson, a pastoral psychologist and university chaplain, was once asked, ***“What is the difference between a good marriage and a bad marriage?”*** His simple answer was ***“Commitment.”*** He said, ***“People don’t live to keep commitments any more. People live to be happy. When they are not happy, they throw their commitments overboard. In marriage, the bottom line is ‘for better or worse.’ If you give yourself an escape route, when the pressure is on you will take it. If you don’t give yourself an escape route, you’ll manage to make some kind of adjustment to your situation.”***

Sounds much like something Jesus would say, doesn’t it? True love is a commitment. Love based only on feelings will not outlive the feelings. Love as *agape* is an act of the whole person, especially the will. It is expressed in promises and vows. It is a commitment to another person. ***“People don’t live to keep commitments any more. People live to be***

**happy.”** It is a prophetic word that indicts our whole culture. But Christ has shown us a better way.

Every discovery of truth begins in faith. Columbus had faith that the earth was round. He went against the common wisdom of the day, and discovered a new world. Einstein had faith that space and time are relative. He went against the science of his day, and discovered a new universe. Christ has faith in us, his followers. It is a faith that can lead us to discover who we really are. I have faith in this church which leads me to say that I would love to be your pastor. And I would love for this to be your church.