

# VALEDICTORY VALIDATIONS

Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2020

Texts: Matthew 28:16-20; II Corinthians 13:11-14

A *valediction* is defined as a word or phrase or speech given as a farewell. The nuance in the Latin root is that it is a “word” to wish that someone may “fare well” as you depart from each other. “Goodbye” is a valediction, a shortened rendering of “*God Be With You*” so you may *fare well*. At a graduation ceremony, a formal valediction (*or valedictory speech*) is given by the *valedictorian*, who is usually the student with the best academic record (*the salutatorian is usually the one who finished with the second highest rank in his or her class, and he/she traditionally gives the salutation, the opening remarks, at the ceremony.*) Two familiar related words are (1) *Malediction*, which is a word or phrase or speech of evil against some one; a cursing, and (2) *Benediction*, which is a good word, a good saying, a blessing. The word **Validation** is not really related, except phonetically ... the dictionary defines validation as an act or process of validating (*uh, that's helpful, Mr. Webster*); and when you look up validate, you'll find that means to affirm the value of something, to confirm, to render valid; or, in the language of law, to validate is to give legal force to (*e.g., validating your driver's license or passport*).

For my late wife, one of the highest and most memorable compliments she received, if not THE highest, was from the pastor whose ministry was so influential in her coming to faith in her mid-twenties. Many of you know how Ann experienced a huge change in her life when she came to faith under the ministry of the National Presbyterian Church when she was working in Washington, D.C. The Rev. Dr. Louis H. Evans, Jr. was the pastor; he was also the pastor who married us in 1990 and who came out of retirement in CA to conduct her funeral here in 1999 (*he himself passed away in 2008*). He and his wife had come to visit us in 1998, a few months after Ann's second surgery, but prior to the diagnosis of her recurrence. It was also the first time the Evans met our children, including Steve, whom we had given the middle name Louis in honor of Dr. Evans; it was such a delight to see then-four-year-old Steve interact with his middle namesake.<sup>1</sup> As Dr. and Mrs. Evans were getting ready to say goodbye, he embraced Ann, and with his classic engaging smile and a tear in his eye gave her what was literally a **valedictory validation**: “*Ann, you are a validation of ministry.*” In his parting words, his valediction, he was basically saying to Ann that the grace of God so evident in her life was a *validation* of all that is good and right and true about Christian ministry ... needless to say; she was so very touched and affirmed by the valedictory validation of this minister and man she so respected and admired.

I like to think of the two lectionary texts for Trinity Sunday as valedictory validations, farewell addresses that affirm; the first given by Jesus to His disciples and the second given by Paul to the members of the church in Corinth, both of which incorporate the Trinitarian language of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These succinctly summarize and validate much, if not all, that is good and right and true about what Jesus and Paul have taught and what their listeners had incorporated into their lives. The first is given by the risen Jesus with the eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee. You'll note that Matthew records when they saw Jesus, “*they worshiped Him, but some doubted.*” It could also be translated, “*they had some doubts.*” They had seen Him heal the sick, feed the hungry, give sight to the blind, cast out demons, and now they see Him alive after having been brutally killed and buried in a tomb, but even after all that, some still had their doubts ... which, by the way, should be somewhat comforting to all of us who gather here week after week to worship Jesus; like the disciples, we, too, often bring our doubts and other difficulties into worship with us. And that's OK! Jesus gives His doubting disciples comforting but concise validations, and He then gives them something to do (*this is a sermon in itself, but often the best dissipater of doubt is diligence, putting what faith you DO have to work!*). He assures them, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto Me.*” And then tells them, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you,*” as if to underscore that ALL He has taught and commanded is valid for EVERYBODY in this world! He then assures them, “*And lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age.*” In His valediction, Jesus succinctly validates just about everything concerning (1) who He was, (2) what He said, (3) what wanted His followers to do, and (c) all He had promised.

In Paul's valediction to the Corinthian church, he writes, “*Finally, brothers, goodbye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*” Then Paul adds to his valediction a benediction, the familiar Trinitarian benediction I often use at the close of worship. “*May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*” Prior to his then unique, but now familiar, benediction, Paul's valediction to this Corinth congregation gave five basic appeals, each worthy of a sermon in itself:

- 1) AIM FOR PERFECTION. In other words, Paul might be saying, “*Yes, I know nobody is perfect; yes, I know none of us can ever achieve perfection; yes, I know we live in an imperfect world, but stop using all that as an excuse for not trying! Aim for perfection!*” At least when you aim for perfection, you come a lot closer to it than if you don't aim for it at all ... and with God's help, you just may find you can come closer than you think!
- 2) LISTEN TO MY APPEAL. This is probably a reference to the entirety of his letters, underscoring that he is not just writing sanctimonious words, he's not just saying all this just because he's a religious professional, he is not just providing fodder for someone to fill a twenty-minute slot in a worship service down the road somewhere ... these words are about crucially important matters of life! Listen up!

<sup>1</sup> For a little more background about my son's middle namesake, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis\\_Evans\\_Jr.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Evans_Jr.)

- 3) BE OF ONE MIND. In other words, have one main common purpose, strive toward one common goal ... which he reiterates elsewhere is to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Be of one mind by trying to think like the one mind of Jesus; aim to please Him; try to honor, emulate and imitate Him in all you do and think.
- 4) LIVE IN PEACE. In other words, do whatever it takes (*within reasonable moral/ethical bounds*) to live at peace with each other, which sometimes involves making personal sacrifices and/or doing things you may be reluctant to do, and/or deferring to other's idiosyncrasies, and/or tolerating differing points of view on what are really non-essential matters. A few years ago I was reading an English writer who used what was to me a peculiar phrase (*I quote from memory*), "*Oh for peace sake will you just stop doing that?*" Note it was not "*for Pete's sake*," which I now suspect may be a distorted Americanism that mangled a perfectly appropriate English idiom. The idiom is this: There are times when we ARE to do or say or tolerate certain things simply for the sake of *living in peace*, for the sake of keeping peace with each other. It's roughly similar to, "*Oh, for goodness sake.*" There are things we do or say simply for the sake of promoting, endorsing, encouraging goodness and the common good; we do or say such things "*for goodness' sake.*" <sup>2</sup>

That's four, I said there were five. The fifth appeal is Paul encouraging the people in this church to greet each other with a holy kiss. To be clear, this wasn't a passionate smooch; it was a gentle kiss of filial affection. The word used here for "kiss" in the Greek is "*filamati*," which has the root prefix that comes from "*fileo*," which everyone from Phileo-delphia knows means "*brotherly love*." They were encouraged to give each other a kiss of filial affection, which was entirely appropriate because the early church understood itself to *be* a family. They were brothers and sisters in Christ, and they took that very seriously and quite literally. They took care of one another, like family. They looked out for each other, like family. They made sure widows and orphans were provided for; they worked hard to be tolerant of each other. One person's problem became everyone's problem; one person's celebration was a cause of celebration for all. They weren't perfect, but they *aimed for perfection* in this, just as Paul exhorted them to. Some may remember when we looked at this passage years ago I asked, "*How many of you remember your first kiss?*" (*I also remember with fondness the late Dr. David Burge sitting in the front pew as his hand shot up in response!*). I then suggested none of you did. Your first kiss probably came from one of your parents soon after you were born. We kiss one another within families to show our love and affection, to demonstrate we ARE family. *And* we kiss one another within families partially because it is almost impossible to stay angry or alienated from someone you have greeted in such a manner. Well, this holy kiss recommended by Paul reminded the early church who they were to be: They were called to be the family of Jesus Christ, called first to love Jesus, then to love each other as brothers and sisters, and then to go out and love the world for which Jesus died! If we love Christ, our next job is to love one another, to care for one another, to watch out for each other, to realize our actions affect one another for good or for ill, to encourage each other in love and affection, and to aim for perfection in this and all matters of faith and life. One might say the watchword of the first century church was "*Kiss and Tell*." The "kiss" was the filial "holy kiss" Paul urged, and the "tell" was what the kiss communicated about that community ... that it was a loving family, a holy family, a family that transcends racial and ethnic and generational and political boundaries, a family united in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ Who told them in His valedictory validation to "... *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.*" In short, go out and by your word and example bring others into the Family!

I'm a bit over my time; I'll save the rest regarding Paul's benediction for another time. For now I'll just close by saying relax, don't worry, I'm not going to require we kiss each other. We're not even supposed to stand too close to each other these days (*unless, apparently, we are out protesting in the streets*). It's believed the heartfelt handshake or gentle hug became the equivalents of the holy kiss sometime during the sixteenth century. But the principle remains: Greet and treat one another like family, for that is who we are. Testify to your affection for one another. As you might do in a kiss, always look each other face to face, eye to eye; don't ever go behind each other's backs. Respect and honor each other as family, as equal heirs of the grace of God, and thus demonstrate to a watching and love-starved world "*... the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.*" Amen.

<sup>2</sup> On this point "for peace sake", I opted to share a recent Facebook post written by a young man who was in the jr. high fellowship when I served the Presbyterian Church of New Providence, NJ in 1989-91. He is now a police officer in Columbus, and is one who conscientiously sees his duty and calling as a "peace" officer (my words), one who helps others live in peace. I read this to underscore, and especially at this troubled time in our nation, how we need to affirm and support and encourage and emulate those who carry out this part of the Pauline valediction, to live in peace and to do all we can for peace sake.

*"In the twenty five years I have been a police officer I have gotten married, become a father, bought a house, been kicked, punched, cut. I have buried friends, baggiped more murdered officers to their final resting place then I care to count. I have investigated shootings, stabbings, and homicides as a detective. I have told more people they have lost their loved ones than I can remember. I have seen abused babies who have had things done to them that no one should see. I wouldn't change it for anything. I LOVE being a police officer. I am so grateful for what it has given me the opportunity to do. To help people. To help bring closure to families of victims. To be part of the solution. I have never questioned my decision to pursue this career. Until now. What happened in MN was terrible. There is no doubt. NO police officer believes that it was anything but wrong. Now we are all being painted with a very broad brush. This is not the first time this has happened. I have been frustrated as a police officer many times. Whether it be because of things being misconstrued in the media or frustrations about my job in general but never has it had such a discouraging impact on my family. Until now. My family has seen stuff on social media from "friends" that is just wrong. I can take it, but my family shouldn't have to. My wife posted an encouraging post and it was immediately attacked. She took it down. My children have seen posts that they have disagreed with. They are afraid to post anything because they are afraid of retaliatory responses. I have been through a lot of stuff over the years but I have never had to watch my city, literally, burn. And we are the bad guys? It has not been all bad. I have received countless texts and calls from family and friends. Acquaintances I have not heard from in years have reached out to offer support. To those people I say with all my heart, thank you. It means more then you can know. I am going to take a break from Facebook for a while."*