

February 1, 2015
I Corinthians 1: 8-13
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“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight O God, our Strength and our Redeemer.”

While I am not much of a football person, I have found myself drawn in by the sincere warmth I see time and again on the face of our Seahawk’s coach, Pete Carroll. The pictures in the paper of Carroll with his arm affectionately tucked around the arm of a player, or the Seattle Times article on Wednesday that contrasted his way of dealing with the media blitz day compared to the Patriots coach, Bill Belichick. Carroll was repeatedly sincere, funny and kind regardless of how off the wall some of the questions were.

And then a colleague shared more stories with me that she had found last year before the Superbowl which has made me even more intrigued with Carroll and our team:

Last year columnist Art Thiel wrote about how aggravating it is to write about the Seahawks coaches because they actually get along! Apparently sports columnists have more fun with soap opera sports that include back-stabbing and in-fighting.

Art Thiel stated last year before the Superbowl: “Pete Carroll and John Schneider are like a musical, just two white suits short of a Fred Astaire-Gene Kelly Ziegfeld Follies number. All they have done so far is win, smile and be nimble in word and deed.”

And while I have your attention and continue to impress you with my Seahawks stories...Let me include one more!

In an article from Espn.com called “**Lotus Pose on two**” from August, 2013 I found out the following about our coach and team:

Pete Carroll came in as the coach to the Seahawks team “craving a chance to reimagine the coaching role in the NFL.” Quote: “I wanted to find out if we really took care of the guys on the team, really cared about each and every individual, what would happen?”

Carroll believes that happy players make better players; “everyone in the facility, from coaches and players to personal assistants and valets, is expected to follow Carroll’s mantras regarding positivity of thought, words and actions. “Do your job better than it has ever been done before,” he tells them. Yelling and swearing are frowned upon, and every media interview with a player or coach ends with a thank-you to the reporter.” (Not sure how true this one is after the week with Lynch)

Mindfulness meditation is one of the ways Carroll fosters this attitude and cares for his players. No one is required to participate but at least twenty of the men show up to breathe in and breathe out and to open their minds for a minimum of 6 minutes before practice. Some of the players have chosen to do a more individualized practice for much longer.

In addition a yoga class is offered which is now mandatory for every player because everyone enjoys it so much.

In Seattle there is an entire staff expressly designed to look out for the players.

A staff that cares about the players – if they are depressed or worried about a loved one, they want to know.

Put all of this in contrast with what is more commonly heard in the NFL when a director of player personnel for one team said to a group of new draft picks:
“Most of you will not be in this league three years from now...Nobody cares about your problems. The fans don’t care. The media doesn’t care. And ownership doesn’t care. They care about results.”

In other words, Carroll’s approach to coaching is unique and inspiring; while he is no doubt focused on winning and makes lots of money for doing so – he does not do it at the expense of relationship or healthy, happy players. Like he said, “he wants to see what it would be like if we really took care of the guys on the team.”

So, you are no doubt asking --- what does this have to do with today’s reading from I Corinthians? Let me tell you...

The church which Paul founded in the town of Corinth in Greece was made up of people who had come from different backgrounds and were at different places on their faith journeys. They had united around the message of Jesus, yet they brought with them their own history, traditions, and rituals. While Paul’s writing about animal sacrifice sounds extremely odd to our ears, it tells us that some of the people came from Greek pagan backgrounds, so it was part of the mix in that particular time and place and it provided challenges that Paul was trying to address.

To help us understand it better you might consider the multitude of Christian traditions in our own country (or even right here in Magnolia) and the rituals that vary between them; or better yet, imagine Jews, Christians and Muslims all joining together in one worshipping community and trying to decide whose beliefs or practices were the “right” ones.

It would not be easy.
Conflict would surely arise.

The wisdom which Paul is trying to teach the struggling congregation in Corinth was to seek to put the relationship between the members of the community first and foremost over declaring who was right and who was wrong.

In other words, if one of Jesus’ **central precepts** is to “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” – then the communities first goal, like Coach Carroll would say, is to take care of the players – the members of the community. To practice respect and care for one another, as a unique child of God, not argue over who has a corner on the truth of faith or religious practice.

This is welcome wisdom in church communities today and in any community really. Choosing to value relationship first – leads to a more civilized community and world.

Scouts is an organization that values taking care of its members and fostering caring relationships, right?

You are a diverse group of young men and adult leaders.

You have different histories and traditions, different ideas about what is the right way to do things or run things I am sure.

Different strengths and weaknesses.

You no doubt argue your way through some situations, but ultimately isn't it the relationships you share that matter the most?

The friendships you build; the experiences you survive together, these will be part of your memory forever and are surely making you into the men you are becoming.

Paul tells the diverse and sometimes stubborn Corinthian church to be aware of how **knowledge can puff us up while love can build us up.**

It is easy for us humans to get caught up in being the one with the answers, the smarts, the right skills or the real truth (I am preaching to myself here)...and some of us are capable of getting so caught up in all of that that we lose sight of the human beings we are in relationship with and we simply rail-road right over them without even caring.

Paul challenges these new church members who think they have the corner on the truth to do a little mindfulness meditation; take a breath and spend some time breaking bread with their neighbor.

Slow down, enjoy the company you keep.

His advice is sound when he tells them that sometimes the most loving use of knowledge or strength or skill is to listen to someone else's ideas; to encourage someone else to step forward and take the lead.

Being right, proving your strength or flexing your muscles is not necessarily the best way to build a Jesus community – or any caring, respectful and civil community. This is true in our churches, in our Scout troops, and in our families. Any of you that have been blessed by marriage know how important Paul's wisdom is here – valuing the relationship is the first priority over proving who is right --- and sometimes, even in a marriage, this is really, really hard, because in the heat of the moment, being right can seem incredibly important...

I am thinking maybe the Apostle Paul and Coach Carroll (well, maybe just Coach Carroll because Paul can get pretty self-righteous) ---could take on congress to see if they might help them nurture caring relationships and find a way towards some common ground for the sake of our country! From the outside it appears that all they do is bicker.

I found it insightful and meaningful in studying this brief passage from 1st Corinthians 8 to remember the well-known words of the Apostle Paul that are also found in 1st Corinthians from Chapter 13 that say the same thing only more eloquently:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing...Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Like the small microcosm of the church in Corinth, we live in an incredibly diverse world. Even the person you call spouse or the person who annoys you that you call brother or sister that you think you know really well; or the one you call friend – is uniquely **different** than you, not to mention the Muslim colleague or the fundamentalist Christian next door ---- all of this is to say that **relationships** are one of our greatest **challenges** as well as one of **God's greatest gifts**.

At first glance I thought this strange scripture about eating or not eating meat that had been ritually sacrificed was well --- strange --- but in the long run I found it rich in wisdom and a welcome reminder how valuable relationships are in any community and how we are called, first and foremost, to try and Love one another in the way that God love's us.

(Let us pray)