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Ephesians 3: 14-21  
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Trinity Episcopal Church  
Sonoma, California

It Ain't Easy:  
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hat

Towards the end of his life, my Dad took to saying, “Old Age ain’t no place for sissies.” He’d say that when he had trouble getting up, trouble moving. And he’d say that as he slid into the passenger side of the car—a place he had not occupied since he was a child. “Old Age ain’t no place for sissies,” he’d say as he said good-bye to the folks who visited him at the nursing home that became his last home. And yet, as I look back on the Dad I knew in those last years of his life, I’m struck by the gifts of his old age—a humor, always disarming but now turned gentle; a deep kindness to folks other people overlooked—perhaps because he was experiencing for the first time being overlooked himself; a playfulness that brought light to even the darkest of times; a patience I’d never seen in him before; and a spirit of adventure that couldn’t be quelled even when you would think days of adventure were long past. “Old Age ain’t no place for sissies,” he would say, “And that’s the gift of it,” I might add.

Communities are a lot like old age—they ain’t for the weak of heart. Living in community ain’t easy. Ask anyone who has spent much time in summer camp or in a college dormitory. Summer campers will tell you about the person who snores so loudly that no one in the cabin can get any sleep. I have yet to find a person who has a good memory of a dormitory kitchen. My college roommate would tell you about how hard it is to live with a person who thinks a closet is just an oversized suitcase.

And yet we can’t escape communities. Even the desert fathers and mothers lived in a rough sort of community. Even hermits are part of a community. Think of Thomas Merton who so longed for a hermitage deep in the woods of his monastery and who, when he was finally able to build that hermitage, worshipped and ate regularly with his fellow monks. He didn’t escape community; he just lived in community in a different way.

Think of the first thing Jesus did when he began his ministry. He said to Andrew and Peter and James and John, “Follow me.” They became a community of disciples—a community of people doing their best to follow Jesus.

That’s what the church at Ephesus was. A community of people doing their best to follow Jesus. A community of discipleship. But living in community ain’t easy. Just ask the folks at the church in Ephesus. They’ll tell you about the all the challenges they faced—challenges a lot more significant than mold growing in dormitory refrigerator.

The church at Ephesus, like the church at Corinth and the church in Thessalonica and the Church in Galatia, struggled to live as a Christian community. Like all the early churches

and the band of disciples as well, the church at Ephesus found itself struggling with disharmony, division and discord.

And yet the author of the letter to the church at Ephesus writes, “I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.’

So often we read those words and hear them directed to us as individuals. But that’s not what’s going on here. Those words, that prayer is directed to a community. Like a southerner saying , “I pray that y’all may be strengthened in your inner being; I pray that y’all may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ; I pray that y’all may be filled with the fullness of God.”

It’s in community that we learn the riches of God’s grace, the wideness of God’s mercy, the depth of God’s love.

It is in community—in the give and take, the to and fro, the lean times and the good times, that we are strengthened in our love of God and one another.

It is in community that we begin to know the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ—in our moments of frustration and our moments of forgiveness, in those times when our own individual faith lags and we are carried by the faith of others, in the stories of God’s grace at work in our lives—both the stories we hear and the stories we tell.

It is in community that we are being rooted and grounded in love.

It is in community that we experience the fullness of God.

But it ain’t easy. We stumble, we fall, we lose our way. Sometimes we disappoint one another. Sometimes we get anxious. We wonder if we will make it. Sometimes we get mad. Sometimes we get weary. Sometimes we get hurt. And yet it is precisely in those difficult moments, those challenging times, that we begin to learn the riches of God’s glory, that we begin to see “that God’s work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.”

Life in Christian Community—it ain’t easy and that’s the gift of it. Thanks be to God.