

# “Fellowship and Standing Firm”

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**Series:** *Romans*

**Bible Text:** Romans 16:1-23

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## **Christ Presbyterian Church**

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If you have a Bible, you can be turning to the New Testament letter called Romans. And make your way to Chapter 16. If you don't have a Bible, you can follow along in the Worship Guide. The passage is printed there for you. This is my periodic gentle reminder to consider for an hour and 20 minutes on a Sunday to just have a Bible open or a Worship Guide and not your phone, because it's going to beep at you like mine does all the time. Let's try for a distraction-free hour and 20 minutes if possible. That's not a law. Romans 14, I just preached it. You can do whatever you want, but, you know, gentle encouragement.

Romans 16, we're looking at 1 through 23 today. We're coming in for a landing on this letter, so it'll be this week and next week. I said last week that Paul usually ends his letters with travel plans and greetings, and if last week was all travel plans, this week is all greetings. This may not be the doctrinal part of Romans that we all know and love. These aren't the verses that you're going to, you know, build a doctrinal treatise out of and write about. They're not the verses you're going to create something that you frame and put in your home. You know, a nice crocheted version of 'Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ', right? It doesn't flow for that. And yet, when God gave us His Word, He didn't cut out these parts. He didn't just give us the main thrust of the letter. We get all of it, which must mean that all of it is beneficial for us. It's all God's Word, and it's all for us. So let's read it and remember that it is God's Word.

### **Romans 16:1-23**

*1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae,*

*2 that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.*

*3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,*

*4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.*

*5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia.*

*6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.*

*7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.*

*8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.*

*9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.*

*10 Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus.*

*11 Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.*

*12 Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.*

*13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.*

*14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.*

*15 Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.*

*16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*

*17 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.*

*18 For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*

*19 For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.*

*20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

*21 Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.*

*22 I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord.*

*23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

*Help us now, our Father, we pray. Give us wisdom, clarity from your word. Help us to understand what we're reading, and more than that, we pray that by your spirit you would take your word and apply it. Help us to see ourselves as the family of God, and help us to fight to stay faithful in your family. We ask for your grace, and we pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

Back when people used to watch movies in theaters, you may recall some of that. Some of you may remember back when people went to the movie theater. It was a thing that people used to do. It was rare for anyone to stay through the credits at the end, right? It's understood that you just skip the credits. In the last 20 years, some filmmakers put little nuggets in the credits or afterward to keep your focus, to kind of draw you in just a little bit more. For good or bad, recently rewatched that work of high cinema, Napoleon Dynamite, and you have to make it all the way to the end of the credits so that you can see Kip and La Fonda's wedding, right? You have to do it. That's the exception, not the rule. Nobody cares about the credits unless you were in the movie or you worked on the film set or it was your project or you were one of the writers or you had something to do with the production of that movie. We don't know what a gaffer is. We don't know what a prop master, my favorite production crew title, what is a best boy?

Nobody knows what a best boy is. I just imagine some child that hangs around the movie set and they just pat him on the head; you're the best boy. What is that? But they know what it is and when they watch the movie credits, it's not just the way the movie ends, token sort of ending. For them, it's a recap. It's the names and the stories and the memories and the identification of that particular project.

It might be helpful for us if we tried to imagine what if there were end credits to your experience and your family? Or what if there were end credits to your life in a particular church for a season? And it was all the cast, everybody that was here while you were here, it was all the different jobs that people did. It would be really interesting.

People are tempted to turn the movie off at this point in the book of Romans and we should not do that. Here in the end credits, we see not just their story and their time, you see your story, you see your work, you see your family. This is a picture for us of the makeup of the church, the actions of the church, what she's supposed to look like, and it's really helpful for us. As we look at the passage, what we see here is a call to stand firm in the truth as members of God's family. That's what the end credits here are for us.

So we're going to talk about what does it mean for us to be a true family of God? But then the second part, what does it mean to be a family of God's truth? So those are the two points that we're looking at today.

### **1. What does it mean to be a true family of God?**

So this is Paul turning to all the people who make up the church in Rome. Remember, he has not been there to visit them, but he knows a lot of them. He knows them through various and sundry things that he's done over the years. And he's acknowledging them, and he asks them to do a few things. The first thing he says is he sends this person called Phoebe, in verse one, we'll talk more about her in a second, but he sends her to them, and he says, make sure that you receive her. I commend her to you. I recommend her to you. To commend someone is to say, hey, this is a trustworthy person. You should receive her. With most people in the passage, what he says is to greet them. Now we read that and we think, oh, okay, so say hello to so and so. It's not less than that, but it's a lot more than that.

Imagine, you have had some interaction with the apostle Paul at some point in your time in history, and Paul is writing to your church and he says to you, hey, tell so and so that I remember them and I love them and I want you to say hello to them. Make sure that you greet them and welcome them. It's a deeply relational phrase that he says here. It's behind the general command in verse 16 to greet one another with a holy kiss. Hopefully cultural customs are in play in that particular phrase. As a non-hugger, I really hope that we are not all sinning because we don't give each other a holy kiss at the end of every church service. I think in the West, a handshake will do. We're going to go with that though.

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*What's behind that is how about we actually begin to see each other as the family of God and we not just with our mouths but with our hearts, reach out and greet one another.*

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All right, well, let's talk about some of these folks. Let's begin with Phoebe. Phoebe is presumably the person who's carrying this letter to the church in Rome. There are a couple of reasons that we think that. She's called here a servant of the church in Cenchreae, which was a port town near Corinth. Most scholars think that Paul wrote this letter while he was in Corinth, so presumably he writes it there. He knows Phoebe. She is this faithful servant in the church in Cenchreae, and so he sends her with the letter to Rome, which would make sense out of why he says, hey, welcome her in a way that's worthy of the saints. Make sure that you receive her, that you help her in whatever she needs. She is a patron of Paul and many others, which seems to indicate that she's a person of wealth. So you've got her as a servant of the church, a person of wealth, deeply involved in the work of ministry, and so they are to receive her.

Now let me just make a note here. She's called in the passage a servant. You may have a translation that says she is a deacon. Let's just deal with that for a minute. The reason that some translations go that route is because the word that's used in Greek is the same word for servant or deacon. It's exactly the same word in Greek, it's *Diakonos*. Most of the time Paul uses it, he just means a servant, somebody who's serving inside the local church. And yes, in the few places where he talks about the office of deacon, he uses the same word. That's true. But to say that definitively Phoebe must be a deacon, you can't say that with certitude. That would be building something based on one verse that's just not as clear. If there were contextual matters that made it clear that she held this office, we would need to pay attention to that.

But that's not really what's happening here. We get a sense of she definitely is involved. She's a patron of the ministry. She's using her gifts, but you don't get the sense that she holds this office. She's a servant, like Paul uses the word elsewhere. People may debate the qualifications and the call of women versus men for the office of deacon and other denominations, and they're free to do that. But to appeal to this passage and say it proves that there were women deacons in the early church really says more about the person who's making that argument than the text of scripture itself. It's just not what Paul's trying to prove here. He's just saying here's who she is. She's a servant of the church. His point here is to say here is a faithful woman serving in the church. She's bringing you this letter. You need to receive her and treat her well. I commend her to you. So you've got Phoebe and then you've got Prisca and Aquila, fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who apparently risked their necks at some point for Paul. We don't know how. This is the Priscilla and Aquila from other places in the New Testament. Apparently, the short version of Priscilla is Prisca, didn't know that. But they housed Paul at one point. They taught Apollos the gospel more clearly in Acts chapter 18. They're faithful servants in the church. They have a church meeting at their house.

Remember, this was an era when the Roman Empire was decidedly anti-Christian, and so there were no public houses of worship, and so they host a church in their house, as was common in those days. And they were fellow workers with Paul. In fact, he calls several people fellow workers with him, Urbanus, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Timothy. Tertius is his amanuensis. That's the scribe, meaning Paul is dictating the letter and Tertius is writing it down. Gaius is hosting them.

Why bring up all of these fellow workers?

It's because Paul the apostle wants you and me and everybody to understand this work doesn't happen by himself. Just because he's an apostle doesn't mean that he alone can accomplish the work of ministry of bringing the gospel to the nations. It requires the entirety of the church. You are fellow workers in the mission of Christ. We've talked about that over the past few weeks. They're doing this together. From Phoebe to Priscilla and Aquila to Tertius, his secretary and scribe, it's a group effort.

Something else to notice in these greetings is the diversity of the church in Rome. There are a bunch of women who were mentioned in this passage, and it's important to note that because in the Roman Empire, women did not have an equal status as men. That's not how it worked. It was the church that came along and said, no, no, no. Women have equal value and dignity before God and in his kingdom, and they are gifted for ministry. Women had a different position in the church than they would have in the Roman Empire, and so he makes sure to point out lots of women who were serving and using their gifts in the church. He mentions people who have Jewish backgrounds. He calls them my kinsmen, Andronicus and Junia, who had been imprisoned with Paul before somewhere. Herodian, very Jewish name, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, all Jewish background. There's a bunch of Gentiles in the mix, very, very Gentile, in fact, named after Roman and Greek gods, Narcissus, Hermes, Hermes, et cetera. Somebody named Persis, that's a Persian name. We could go on.

The point is that what Paul said in Galatians is true here. The church is made up of men and women, of Jew and Greek, of slave and free. It was then, it is now, it always is. This is a true family that should have a thousand barriers to their fellowship. Men and women were not on the same level in the Roman Empire. Slave and free do not associate. Greek and Gentile and Jew certainly don't associate together. What he is saying is that, no, in the church, all of the barriers between those groups of people have been brought down, and people have been united to each other because they're united to Christ.

### **It's a true family.**

It's appropriate on Mother's Day to see in verse 13 that Rufus's mother functioned as a mother to Paul as well, but if you find yourself on the inside of a church, you suddenly now have many mothers. You have many fathers, many brothers, many sisters. It's that kind of family. It's tight, and it's true because of our union with Christ.

Again I say, this is not just the end credits for us to skip. It's a picture of what the family looks like. It's diverse in all the right ways, not in the politicized, strange ways of the 21st century in America. This is not diversity for diversity's sake. This is God fulfilling the promise to make a people for himself from every tongue, tribe made up of every single socioeconomic status, both genders, all sorts of backgrounds of people. It seems to have rich and poor, pagan background, religious background, slave and free. All are to be greeted and reminded of their bond and their work.

So here's my question for you.

In a strange list of greetings, can you possibly see yourself, and can you see your brothers and sisters, can you actually begin to see yourself in some of the terms used here?

Have you ever thought of yourself as, one of the words he uses, beloved, of God and of these people?

Have you ever thought of yourself as a worker in the kingdom of God with gifts and usefulness?

Have you ever thought of yourself as a fellow sufferer along with all of these other people or as a triumph of the grace of God?

Do you think of yourself as a servant, as a teacher, as a second mother to someone, as one approved, as a kinsman who believes?

Do you think of yourself as one who is seen, who is loved, who's valued, and who is worthy of a greeting?

Can you see that you have a place in the family of God by faith in Christ?

The church is honestly kind of, we're a bit of a motley crew, right? I mean, not impressive. I don't say that to insult you or myself, but I mean, the church is not filled with the richest people in the world. It's got all sorts of income levels. And the church is not filled with just the attractive people of society. It's all kinds of different people. And the church is not always filled with the most successful or the most powerful. And yet, by God's grace, we're called the family of God made impressive by the work of his spirit in our lives and all for his glory.

Some of you here might be an Epaenetus. You are the first convert that you know of in your entire family line, going back for generations.

Or you might be the first to have struck a blow against the sin patterns that have defined the darkness of your family existence for ages.

Others of you might be a second father, second mother to someone in the church who needs that kind of help. That's how it's supposed to be.

Can you see yourself as a valued member of the family of God? And can you see the people in front of you and behind you in that way as well?

When you think of other people inside the church, what do you see?

We tend to see people based on one evaluation grid, and that is where these people stand in relation to me. And so if somebody is your social better, to use a British class system sort of phrase, if that's how you evaluate, they will be, oh yeah, they are an important person. They are a high and exalted person. Or others will be, oh, they are lowly and needy and they just drain the life out of me, right? And this passage actually invites you to drop that evaluative grid entirely and just begin to view people as God views them, beloved in Christ, beloved in the church, gifted and useful in the kingdom of God, regardless of their personality or any other criteria.

This is why we actually encourage you to talk to one another after a church service. It's not just so that we make visitors feel welcome. What we're saying is, would you please greet one another as people who have been greeted in Christ ultimately? Some churches actually make this part of their liturgy. You might have been in a church where they passed the peace. We don't do that here for a number of just logistical reasons. It always seems to interrupt the flow of everything. But the point behind it is good. The point behind passing the peace is to stop what you're doing, find somebody that you may not have any relationship with, and as someone who has received the peace that is yours in the gospel, turn and, in a sense, pass it horizontally now to another person. Welcome them as you've been welcomed in Christ. Why? Why would we do any of that? Why would we show up and deal with these people every Sunday and in community groups? Because in Christ you are being made the true family of God.

Now, do you know what happens to families? Sometimes they break. Some of you have been part of church families that have broken before. Some of you have been part of nuclear families that have been broken. Is there anything we can do to not become a broken church family? A divided family, a family where somebody has left and gone off the rails.

## **2. God's true family needs to be a family of God's truth.**

It's weird to go from greet one another with a holy kiss to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine you've been taught and avoid them. And yet it makes absolute sense.

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*The greatest threat to the true fellowship of God's people is a false teacher, a divisive person, and someone who goes around creating obstacles trying to get people to split and divide and trip over them.*

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It'll destroy a church every time. This is everything from outright heretical teachers to people who have a divisive spirit to folks who were contrarian by nature to folks who take those Romans 14 issues of conscience where they're not clear from the scriptures, and they make them the line of sand of orthodoxy. It includes all of that. And he says that they are seeking to divide and their aim, look at verse 18, he says their aim isn't true. They're not serving the Lord Christ. They're serving their own appetites, their own bellies, he says, meaning they're trying to get something for themselves. Beware the brand builder inside the church of Jesus. Beware the person who is constantly trying to platform themselves and to gain something from everybody else for their own power.

He mentions their methods in verse 18, *smooth talk, flattery and deception*. So here's how they work. They find someone who is naïve, and in this context naive doesn't it's not the negative connotation that we have. Naive here means sincere but maybe not very aware, right? They find someone who is sincere but not very aware and they quietly, subtly begin to introduce smooth words, deceptive ideas, flattery. They talk about how great you are, and suddenly they have captured their prey and they begin to introduce division and trouble and divide the family.

If you're a sincere Christian, what are you supposed to do with this? Look at verse 19. He says, their obedience is known to all. The church in Rome was really doing well. They were doing great. Known for their sincerity and faithfulness to the Lord but he says he wants them to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. So this is a call for discernment, shrewdness.

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*Know what is good and right and true so well that you can spot what is not good, right, and true.*

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And don't be innocent as to what is evil. Don't toy with it. Don't dabble in it. Don't cozy up to it while trying to reach the world. Don't become like the world. You recall Jesus who said he wanted his followers to be innocent as doves and shrewd as serpents, meaning have some discernment. Don't live with your head in the sand. Be aware that there's evil out there and not everybody has a good intent and some people will use words to try to flatter and persuade and smoothly pull you over to their side.

**Test all things against the scriptures.** Also don't become a cynic who never believes anyone. That could be a temptation as well.

But the naive could be tempted to think that Christianity is really, you know, people are good and they're to be trusted and there's no evil in the world and life is kind of this precious moments, you know, sort of figurine display and it's just not true and it's not helpful to think that way. We need to be wise.

The other thing he says is that we need to watch for these things and avoid these people. Now there's not many places, I mean very often we're told to engage, to argue, to try to win or persuade and you're not told that here. You're told, yeah, if you see someone who's being divisive and trying to put obstacles in the way of the church, no, no, run away, avoid them. There's a place for boundaries and cutting off things that are crazy and false.

Let me say, in the age of the internet and podcasts and influencers this is alive and well. It's just so alive and well. I've talked to folks over the past couple of years and this is how it goes. Yeah, I've got this family member. They were great. They were normal. Everything was going fine in their life. And then they found this podcast and gosh, I can't even talk to them anymore because all they want to talk about is this thing, this whatever it is. They get hijacked. I bet you know some folks that have done the same thing.

Sometimes we put the smooth talk and the flattery into our ears, in our own earbuds and often they will show their hand. Here's how they'll often show their hand. If your church doesn't talk about X, Y or Z this Sunday, it's time to find a different church and X, Y or Z is not the doctrine of God, the person and work of Christ, salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone or any of the other very clearly defined doctrines from the Bible. It's their thing, whatever their thing is. If they don't talk about their thing this Sunday, you need to find a different church. That is by definition a divisive person, putting an obstacle in the way saying if they don't do this, you have to go a different direction.

Hear me. There are things to divide over. If you're going to a church that never preaches the gospel or has their theology wrong, yeah, by all means, find another church, please. If I start dabbling in wrong theology, you should find another church. Also fire me. But that's not what these folks are doing. There are a thousand false teachings and heretical ideas that are out there, but anytime someone makes their thing the main thing and makes it a point of division, here's what you do. Don't go along. Avoid them. Take out the earbuds. Turn off the podcast. Run away. Do what our first parents failed to do, and they are the paradigm here.

Look at what Paul says. He mentions, Jimmy said it earlier. He mentions Genesis three and Satan being crushed under our feet. Who was it that first came with smooth talk and flattery and deception and specifically came to a person who was sincere in their faith, but a little bit unaware? It is exactly how the serpent came to our first mother and father, Adam and Eve. It's exactly how it happened. He came and he introduced a subtle question. Did God really say, and then he questioned God's motive and goodness that there was something that Eve might have, but God didn't want her to have it because God is by nature withholding. He's not good. You can't trust him. And so she literally bit it and Adam was right there with her and he bit it too. And neither of them stood up to the enemy. Neither of them ran away, which would have been a great response. Neither of them said, get behind me, Satan. Neither of them did that. And so now by their fall, we are brought into the same fall, and the whole biblical story, as one reads it, is waiting for what we read earlier in Genesis 15 for this seed of the woman who would finally crush the head of the serpent and undo all of this mess that's been done.

And you and I know the rest of the story. He came. He came, and in the wilderness, he was tempted by the subtle, seductive enemy and he defeated him over and over and over. And finally, someone has lived a perfect life as a better second Adam. And then he goes and he dies in place of sinners like us so that justice can be satisfied and mercy can be extended. And he's raised triumphantly from the dead. And at that moment, when he steps out of the tomb, the head of the serpent is crushed. He has been given a mortal wound.

Paul says that, interestingly, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Here's what that means. It's that between Christ's first coming and second coming, the enemy has a mortal wound, but he's allowed, he's like a dog on a chain. He's just kind of, he's allowed to do some stuff. He's got some leeway, but he has a mortal wound because of the work of Christ. And Paul's saying your union with the risen Christ is so close that as he crushed the serpent's head at his resurrection, you are in him. And it is as if you are crushing the serpent's head as well, not on your own, but by your union with the serpent crusher himself. You're in him that far in his death. You died in his resurrection. You've been raised in his triumph over the enemy. You have triumphed over the enemy. And that's why we have reason to believe the church makes it.

The church makes it. The church wins in the end, not because we're so strong, but because Jesus won in the end. For now, watch out for the evil one. Avoid those who would try to distract you and divide you and put obstacles in your way. Be a family that is committed to the truth. And that's the call for us from the passage.

**Love the truth and know the truth, and know it so well that you can spot falsehood and division and obstacle.**

We can't know whether our children will continue in the faith or not. We can't. We wish we could, but we can't. It's not how God set up the world. But how will we do everything in our power to make sure that our kids know the truth and don't go off the rails because they started listening to stupidity and to falsehood? We're not in control of it, but we have a job to do when it comes to disciplining our little ones.

How will we ourselves in our world? What can we do as far as it depends on us to not be the person who, you know, they were doing fine, then they started listening to this and they became a crazy person. I don't want to be a crazy person, I bet you don't either. How do we avoid it? How do we become people who persevere firm in faith to the end? Watch for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine you've been taught and avoid them. Don't let their voice into your ears or your home or your heart.

This isn't the same as critically engaging with other ideas or people who have different views than you. Yeah, we have to engage with the world around us. But there's plenty that, we just need to avoid them. We don't need to let them have our ears or our hearts. More than that, we need to know the voice of the Good Shepherd so well. His voice is so clear in our ears that when we hear smooth talk and flattery and deception, we know exactly what it is. It has the ring, the smell of sulfur, and the slithery talk of the serpent in it, and we can identify it.

At a minimum, having a quiet time is a way to not become a crazy person, you could put it that way. Reading the Bible and praying is a preventative measure to not fall off the theological or moral cliff. It's not a guarantee, but it's a sure good tactic to take. I would urge you to have that mentality when it comes to the spiritual disciplines. It's a battle tactic. It's a way to stay engaged in the war, test everything by the scriptures, love the truth and know it.

But you know what? The reason that you and I have hope that we will endure really is not based on the quality of our quiet time or the depth of our knowledge of the Bible, though we're supposed to know the Bible. The hope that you and I have of winning has everything to do with Jesus who crushed the head of the divisive obstacle creating enemy, and at the end will crush him under our feet as well. We only win because Jesus has already won. That's the reason for our confidence. Yes, read, study, try to sniff out what's false, avoid it, yes, all of that, and do that as one who's resting in the perfect life, vicarious death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

If you're here and you're not yet a Christian, glad you're here, welcome. Here's what I would leave you with. How do you know what's true and what's false? How do you know what's true and what's false? Based on what? My guess is that if you're like the rest of our world, it's, well, based on what sounds true to me, based on what feels true on my insides. And I just want to poke on that and remind us all that humans' thoughts and feelings about what's true can change based on what we ate for breakfast this morning, right? Surely there's got to be something better than what I think and how I feel. I would urge you to sit with that. We'd love to talk to you more about that.

Brothers and sisters, these are your people. This is your family. A people from all over, a people of all types, all sorts, brought together because of God's mercy to you and to them in the gospel of Jesus. You are the beloved. You are the worker. You are the servant and the sufferer, and you are also in Christ the triumphant. And so greet and welcome one another like you're actually a family. And then go fight for one another. Stand firm in the truth and avoid crazy, and call crazy and falsehood what it is and just be honest about it. But do that while you're putting your confidence in the one who came and crushed the head of the serpent so decisively that he lets you step on his head too. Let's pray.

*Father, we come to you and we do ask for your grace. We ask that you who began a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. We pray that you would help us to identify as part of your true family. Help us to identify each other as part of your true family, Lord. For all those who are in Christ, let us know what it means to know each other and greet each other and see the giftedness and the usefulness and all of the things that you call us, Lord. Knit us together as a family and help us to fight and stay in the truth. We praise you, Jesus, that you have defeated our enemy and our hope for victory is firmly in you. So we look to you for help. We pray, Jesus, in your name, amen.*

\*\*Portion of scripture read before sermon—Genesis 3:1-15