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## Care

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler  
Atlanta, Georgia  
The Third Sunday After the Epiphany**

*In the Spirit, we were all baptized into one body...  
You are the body of Christ and individually members of it...  
God has so arranged the body,...  
that there may be no dissension within the body,  
that the members may have the same care for one another.  
If one members suffers, all suffer together with it.*

- 1 Corinthians 12: 13, 27, and 24-26.

We live in an age of acronyms. There is a member of this congregation, however, who works for one of the finest acronyms I can imagine. I visited him in his office once, and he gave me one of his organization's promotional coffee mugs as a gift. So, now I carry that mug around with four simple letters on it: C-A-R-E.

CARE. It's a fine relief and care organization, as I hope you all know. But I also hope we know what a powerful verb that is, too. I want to speak this morning on care, on pastoral care, on spiritual care, on caring for one another.

James Taylor once sang that he was "a fool to care, a fool to care, a fool to care." "But I don't care even if I was a fool, I'm still in love with you."

Care is the reason the relationships endure. Why do relationships end in our time? Not necessarily because somebody stopped "loving." But because somebody stopped caring.

I know that love is important. But that word sounds too easy. We know we are supposed to love; we can't argue against love. We accept that responsibility without thinking about it. We almost love without caring about it.

Which is to say, unfortunately, that we love "carelessly."

People fall out of love because we stop caring. "You don't care about me," the woman sobs to her man. "Yes, I do," the man argues back. "Yes, I do. I do, I do." But there is nothing the man can show which will prove his words. There is something about care that proves itself.

To care about someone is to be touched by that someone. To care for someone is to allow myself to be touched by that someone. To care for someone means that when she cries, I am moved by that. To care for someone means that when he is hurt, then I am hurt, too. To care for someone means that I allow myself to be emotionally connected to that someone.

Most of us, wherever we are in life, want someone who cares for us. We want a place where people care for us. We want a church where people care.

Let's look at church for a moment. True care in a church is a gift which does wonders. That pastoral care is what truly holds a parish body together. A church who cares can weather almost any storm. This means that even when people are in conflict, or when people are disagreeing, which is absolutely inevitable, even then, if people are truly caring for one another, then the church is actually made stronger.

Let me say that more clearly. Pastoral care in a church does not mean that we all agree on every issue. When I say that I want "care," I do not mean that you must agree with me. Rather, I want to know that you have heard me, that you have been concerned about what I say. When I want care, I want people to be moved by my own condition.

Consider this: When a priest visits the sick in hospitals, she goes there to care for them. She is not the physician, with a diagnosis and a prescription that will heal them. She is visiting the hospital to provide something else. She is there to provide pastoral care. The priest is there to remind the person that someone has been moved by their condition. The church has been moved. The church has been affected. The church cares.

Thus, when a priest provides true pastoral care at the hospital, a touch occurs. This touch is healing itself. Healing occurs when we know that someone cares. Again, the priest does not have to have the right answers. The priest does not have to agree with everything the patient says. But the priest has to care. When the priest cares, healing occurs.

Jesus, of course, was part of a pastoral community. Even before he was recognized as Savior and Lord, Jesus was part of his hometown community, Nazareth, where he was raised. He began his ministry of care in that local synagogue, where he read from the prophet Isaiah. He certainly cared for that community, but his very first sermon was so controversial that he was run out of his hometown. We will read about it in the next few weeks. Read Luke chapter four. Jesus certainly cared, but the community did not accept his care.

Later on in his ministry, Jesus is accused of not caring. His disciples are on a boat. Jesus is asleep in the back. A storm erupts. "Teacher," they call out, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38). Later, a woman named Martha complains that her sister Mary is not doing her share: "Teacher," she calls out, "Do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work?" (Luke 10:40).

Only later do these folks realize how much Jesus truly did care. True care is sometimes un-noticed at first - because we confuse agreement with care. We tend to think that if someone does not automatically agree with us, then that person does not care. We tend to think that if someone does not answer our question, or need, in exactly the way we want, then that person does not care.

Pastoral care is much more than that. Pastoral care is much more than agreement.

Pastoral care is a willingness to be touched, deep down in the spirit, by another person. Pastoral care is a willingness to have one's spirit changed.

In fact, pastoral care is a willingness to enter another person's life in the same way -in the same way- the God does in Jesus Christ.

How does God care for his people? Does God give us exactly what we ask for every time? Does God care for us by always agreeing with our every issue? Why does God even care at all?

Psalms 8 declares, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" What are we that you should care for us at all?

The miracle of life is that God does care. God does not only love. God also cares. God is willing to be touched, to be changed, by our needs and our plight. God is even willing to suffer.

This is what makes the Judaeo-Christian understanding of God so different from classical Greek understandings of God. To the ancient Greeks, God was -by definition- unchanging and unable to suffer. The Greek Gods, ideally speaking, were

unaffected by the human condition.

But if one cannot suffer, then one cannot care.

Essentially, to care means to be willing to suffer. To care means to be willing to change. It does not mean changing one's mind in each instance. When I care for you, I do not necessarily agree to agree with you on every issue. But I do indicate my willingness to be affected, to be moved emotionally, to change in my spirit, so that our spiritual body -in Christ- is widened.

To care means to be willing to suffer. This is why the passion itself is so central to Christian faith. This new movie, *The Passion*, produced by Mel Gibson, will be powerful indeed, because it shows so graphically and emotionally to what degree Jesus was willing to suffer, to be changed, to undergo passion.

Jesus did not always agree with his antagonizes, but he certainly cared for them - he cared for us- and that is what the power of the passion is. By the way, do not commit the historical fallacy that just because Jesus was Jewish and his immediate world was Jewish that his passion was only a Jewish event. Do not believe that his death was by caused by Jews, or can be blamed on Jews.

It was humanity who put Christ to death -humanity who includes Christian and Jew, Hindu and Moslem, religious and non-religious, those aware and those unaware. It is, today, humanity, who puts Jesus to death, when we reject his love for us and for others, when we reject his grace for us and for others.

Yes, this is the same humanity who Jesus is willing to care for. Jesus gives us pastoral care. With that care, we give pastoral care to one another. When one members suffers, we all suffer.

Maybe it is a foolish thing to care. It doesn't make logical sense. Why would I want to be affected by you? Why would you want to be affected by me?

Because, ultimately, we are in love. To be in the Spirit, is to be in love itself. Even when we do not love, or even when we cannot love, we can be "in love." God has put us here, together, to be members of one body, to be in a body of love. When one member suffers, we all suffer. We can suffer because God first suffered for us. We can care, because God first cares for us. We can love because God first loved us.

AMEN.

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