

“Have the Same Love!”

Alyce McKenzie had an Uncle Jim, who after retiring from the army, became a Methodist local pastor. She shared the following story about her relationship with her uncle, “... when I got home from school, the phone was ringing. I picked it up and immediately recognized his gravelly, East Texas accent. ‘Alyce, this is your Uncle Jim. I was to the doctor today, and got some tests back. He said it didn’t look good. You know I’m an old weather man and we like predictions. So, I said to him, ‘Level with me, doc. How bad is it? Do I have six months?’ He said, ‘Maybe four.’” Alyce’s uncle continued, “So, I’m putting the trailer up for sale and Minnie and I are moving back to Pennsylvania to be near our family. We won’t be able to be with you this Thanksgiving. I just wanted you to know.”

Alyce explained, “You can do a lot in four months. You can sell your trailer. You can move with your spouse back home where you grew up. You can make sure she has a doctor and a church for when you’re gone. You can attend the family reunion your loved ones organize at the home church.”

Alyce McKenzie elaborated, “Level with me means ‘Be honest with me.’ It also means, literally, level with me. On the same plane. One person is not higher than another. I am level with you. You are level with me.” McKenzie continued, “That was apparently the problem at Philippi, some people feeling they were better than others. Some people today think they are better than others. They have all kinds of reasons. They’re good looking. They have money, educational credentials, possessions, power to influence others. Those things aren’t necessarily bad. But they don’t make anybody better than anybody else in the eyes of God, in the mind of Christ. They’re level with you. They’re level with me. Some people think they are not as good as others. For all kinds of reasons. They’re not good looking. They don’t have money, educational credentials, possessions, power to influence others. Not having those things doesn’t make them lower than anyone else. Not in the eyes of God. Not in the mind of Christ.

Alyce McKenzie concluded, “Jesus didn’t elevate himself, according to our hymn from Philippians. He came down to our level. And if the Son of God refused to elevate himself, then why would anyone dare to elevate him or herself above others? Jesus came to earth to be level with you and level with me. So why would any of us still keep our eyes cast down, making ourselves lower than our Savior views us?” (“Level with Me: Reflections on Philippians 2:1-11” posted by Alyce McKenzie on <patheos.com/progressive-christian>)

The beautiful ancient song about Jesus and how he leveled himself with us is an important focus for today. The video before the Prelude shared that message with us. We have emphasized the hymn during many Worship celebrations over the years of this congregation. However, the example Jesus provided us, as attested to by that ancient witness, has enhanced importance when we make a close examination of the first four verses of the Reading. The Apostle Paul explained to the Philippian Christians in **verse 1**, ***“Your Life in Christ makes you strong, and his love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another.”*** Our Life – New Life in Christ gives us strength! Jesus’ agape love provides us the comfort we need! By the way, the “Life in Christ” and Jesus’ agape love are essentially the same, for as that ancient hymn explained, Jesus’ agape love was manifested in his self-giving for all

people – his humble obedience to and expression of the Divine Parent’s Agape Love. The apostle noted our Fellowship with God’s Spirit binds us together as we express agape love toward one another – demonstrate “kindness and compassion for one another.”

Paul went on to urge the Philippians and all of us to continue down that unified path of embodying Jesus’ and God’s Agape Love. He wrote in **verse 2**, ***“I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same [agape] love, and being one in soul and mind.”***

The Apostle provided specific details about this New Life in Christ in **verses 3 and 4**, ***“Don’t do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another’s interests, not just for your own.”*** Unfortunately, popular public religious understandings have frequently either forgotten or ignored those words! Instead, folks have often sought to make Christianity be about benefitting themselves. Such as, what is important is making sure I am guaranteed a place in heaven after I die. And/or, I need to obtain God’s Blessings by not doing bad things, so I live the “good life” in the present.

Following Paul’s instructions to “have the same agape love”, we need to put the needs of one another and of others ahead of our own individual desires and wants. We are called to show radical respect and hospitality toward everyone and to look out for the welfare of the community of believers and even for those outside the Church family. We are to agape love – be self-giving and sacrificial in our service of one another and others. When we are serving the Church or the city, state, nation, or world, we are to do it for the benefit of those we serve, instead of to loot for the benefit of our personal selves. The following video somewhat sadly and humorously exposes that self-serving and self-profiting approach many supposed Christians and, especially recently, national government leaders have exhibited when they claim to be serving others. [The video, “A Servant’s Heart” was shown.]

The video concluded by quoting **verse 3 of our Scripture**, ***“Don’t do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves.”*** Those qualities of life belong to the New Life in Christ – to the same agape love Jesus demonstrated in his leveling with us in his life and public ministry and in his death and resurrection! We are called to share that same agape love. Yes, we are to welcome everyone – especially those rejected and oppressed in society. We are to give of ourselves and our resources to aid others to join us in receiving and living the New Faith Relationship with God – the New Life in Christ. Because God’s Son – the Word became flesh – humbled himself to level with us and to manifest God’s Agape Love for us, we are welcomed into the New Life in Christ and New Faith Relationship with God – the life of having “the same agape love” among us and toward all people.

So, the questions God has put before us through the Apostle Paul are, ***“Will you and I have that same agape love toward one another and every other person? Will we serve one another, God and Jesus, and everyone else or will we merely seek to selfishly benefit ourselves? Let’s live the same agape love shown by our Divine Parent through God’s Son, Jesus Christ! Amen.***