

Greet one another with a Holy Kiss - 1 Cor.13:12

A Sermon by Michael Palmer

For many people greeting one another has been extremely difficult during our COVID19 Spacial distancing - Especially for those for whom their normal greeting involves touch - of the like of a Handshake or a Hug or a kiss

And for those for whom the touch component is so strong they are looking for 'COVID-safe' touch point alternatives - most commonly elbows & feet - slap or a tap on the back

It is right to find appropriate greetings - they are wonderful indications of key aspirations for the relationship

In Tanzania - it was very important to make sure that both hands were visible in a greeting - the extended right hand in greeting would have the left hand placed in the forearm of the right - to show that they had no hidden weapons.

Meaning is one of trust and peace

Hand holding is important - a greeting where the hand was not released for some time.

The meaning is one of friendship and kinship

The Namaste of south-east Asia - **while it may have peace and trust included is certainly about respect but more about unity - we united (self and other) - without hypocrisy - even inner unity - both sides of my brain united. - no duplicity**

We, of course, greet without touch very effectively - Greeting - is a smiling eye, a waving hand, open hands, our stance (Bow), a nod, a chin, our words, the pitch of your voice - these can do just as well.....

It is a helpful time, our COVID-safe season, for us to reflect on this passage - Greet one another with a Holy Kiss (2 Cor.13:12)

COVID-safe practice has taught us that a symbol can vary while still conveying the core meaning - of 'good to see you'

The COVID-safe season has challenged us to see that the absence of a particular form of greetings need not diminish our relationship/s - reminding us of what was always true - namely the important ingredient is the actions that follow my greeting, whatever form that greeting might have taken !

So what was the the Holy Kiss greeting attempting to convey? And what is the appropriate action expected if one were to be true to the 'Holy Kiss' greeting?

(The Symbol and its meaning and its trajectory/promise)

At one level the Kiss was a very common oriental greeting - regardless of religious affiliation - It was a greeting especially located within a family - And hence - It is certain that this family meaning was intended to be part of the meaning when adopted within the Christian community.

The theology that we are all one in Christ - Children of God and fellow heirs with Christ..... Gal.3:27-29

This is certainly true - and extremely important - When we greet - with whatever touch or simply a nod - within the Church - our greeting says you belong - not just as friend but Family! However - not diminishing this one bit - we can safely say that the greeting that St.Paul refers to is this and more!

Note Paul does not say kiss without an adjective - he says 'Holy' Kiss. Now, 'Holy' is a defining attribute of God - and so we need to look into the 'personhood' of God to appreciate the content of Holy! Especially as we are considering greeting one another.

At the heart of Christian Theology of God is the concept of Trinity - (God as Father and Son and Holy Spirit - One God - three distinct persons and yet one nature.

From the Trinitarian relationship perspective - The Holy Kiss - enlarges the meaning from just the intimacy of family to include the shape of our connections within the family - They are to be Holy in the same way that God in the interpersonal relationships of the Trinity are holy - that is of generous other person centred Unity.

God's true nature is characterised not by selfish grabbing, but by an open-handed giving.....ever giving, and in receiving/taking ever in gratitude to honour and never diminish.

So a Holy greeting - be it kiss or nod - is never to be presumptuous or self-serving.

Also as this holy Trinitarian relationship is shared equally to all the persons of the Trinity so, if it is adopted as a Christian greeting, it is to be generously extending to all the members of the Church - not just 'our' tribe or 'one' nation - not just Jew and Gentile - BUT All the saints - across the Roman World - and as the Christian message spread and the church grew - believers baptised into the name of the Triune God - Father, Son & Holy Spirit - then that generous uniting greeting was and is to be extended throughout all the nations of the world!

Well, this is the theology in which the Holy Kiss is set - But like all greetings - it is only Holy if it is - without duplicity or hypocrisy - No matter how dignified the Holy Kiss or any Holy Greeting might be - if behind it is hid an intent to harm or harass or abuse then any greeting, regardless of form - whether kiss or nod or elbow tap would become a meaningless or dead symbol!

(As an aside - Symbols can easily become dead by hypocrisy or partisanship. We have had a blatant example of this during this last week when President Trump held up a Bible, supposedly to show he is a man of peace, unity and principle. But whatever is intent, the symbolism was lost as his actions and words incited division and betrayed a deep naivety in his appreciation of both the Bible and also the God of the Bible)

To save any Holy greeting from becoming meaningless, the person who would name their greeting as Holy must conform, the whole of their attitude towards others according to the shape of both the interpersonal generosity within the Trinity and also the gracious kindness of God towards us in Jesus - One who came alongside us - was at meal with us - wept with us - died to forgive - rose from death to share his ever life with us. Here was no mere nod or kiss or bow. If a greeting is to convey - respect - purity - unity - peace and gracious love. If it is to communicate 'family'. If it is to be informed by the Holiness of God then it will also be constant and consistent for God is the same yesterday today and forever.

Who can achieve such a greeting? We can, when in humility we are informed by the Scripture, and are diligent in prayer, and faithful to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Then it be possible

.....as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'

*1 Peter 1:15-16 - Amen! ******