Pastor Richard Allen Farmer

The Crossroads Church

5587 Redan Road

Stone Mountain, GA 30088

770-469-9069

Holy Hugs

Text: 2 Corinthians 13:12; Acts 20:35-38

Not far into the Covid-19 pandemic, I drove to New York City, from Stone Mountain, GA, to see my mother*.* It was in May of 2020. She and I had not seen each other for several months, although we talked on the phone daily. When I arrived at her Bronx co-op apartment, I was wearing a mask as was my 89-year-old mother. I was wondering how we were going to handle our greeting. I am very protective of her. I didn’t want to endanger her. Her immune system was more fragile than mine. She has a housemate that is ten years younger than she. I needed to be careful as I greeted these two grand senior ladies. My mother opened the door and I remember going for a fist bump or some other light contact gesture. My mother hugged me and kissed me. I wanted that. We were back!!! Kissing is how we have ALWAYS greeted each other.

So it was in the first century church. The more-common-than-not greeting was a kiss. Paul’s directive here, which is repeated in 1 Corinthians 16:20, Romans 16:16, 1 Peter 5:14(kiss of love) and 1 Thessalonians 5:26, was a suggestion on the *how* of the kiss.

I want to make two observations about the kiss in the faith community.

1. The kiss was a social custom with holiness potential

In many countries it is customary to kiss persons on the cheek when you greet them. Paul says, “You’re already kissing, now turn that kiss into a holy kiss”. In the communion liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the kiss of peace was exchanged between the clergy: clergy kissing the bishop, laymen kissing laymen, and women kissing the women, according to the Apostolic Constitutions. Today the kiss of love is exchanged between concelebrating priests (Wikipedia). Justin Martyr’s historical document, *First Apology,* records a line, “when we have ceased from our prayers, we greet one another with a kiss”.

Let’s imagine that our national custom for greeting was always to pat each other on the back. Paul is saying, “Pat each other with a holy pat.” The Church is that community of people who transforms the ordinary acts of culture and gives them a Christological significance. Social custom has the potential to be Christianized. We take the hug and sanctify it. We take the kiss and make it a holy kiss. When we kiss each other, if we choose to kiss, it is a *pure* kiss; a non-sexual kiss; an expression of our Christly affection for each other.

*The holy kiss...must be no meaningless formality, but the outward and visible sign of that mutual charity...which should characterize all Christian people.[[1]](#footnote-2)*

**Illus.**

Andrew Cuomo, the 56th governor of the state of New York since 2011, is currently under fire for inappropriate physical expressions toward women in his office. His attorney, Rita Glavin says that “the Governor strives to foster a strong sense of collegiality within his team. he is informal with his staff and banters with all employees...regardless of gender, in an effort to bring collegiality and levity to their high-pressure and demanding positions”.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Cuomo, in his defense, says that he’s naturally affectionate. He always kisses and touches those who are important to him, he says. Many would say that the governor’s hugs, touches, and kisses are NOT holy.

However, having heard of Governor Cuomo’s case, we need not disallow all physical expressions of affection. We need to eschew lewdness and see that what we do is done in a *pure* way. Paul is saying that the culture kisses and we, the followers of Jesus, can turn that into a *holy* kiss. The social custom has potential to be transformed into a holy something else.

2. The holy kiss is an opportunity to bear witness

The hug (or kiss) is an opportunity to make a statement to the watching world.

John 13:34

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Obviously, Jesus is speaking of demonstrative love. The world would not take note if the disciples were simply thinking loving thoughts of each other, No, they were doing something that could be observed.

Jesus tells His followers that the world is watching them **and** the way they express themselves to each other. When Judas kissed Christ (Matthew 26:47-49), it was a kiss of treachery and deceit. It was still a kiss, but if the world watched that kiss they would see a different *kind* of kiss. Jesus says, in John 13, “The world is watching how you, my disciples, have love for each other and show it. Give the world a good show!!”

Dr. Thomas Constable wrote:

*Until unity prevailed in the church this kiss was hypocritical.*

There is a toxic masculinity in our world which forbids men to show affection to their sons or other men. How sad!!!!

This Pauline suggestion in our text is not gender specific. It is not, “Women, greet other women with a holy kiss.” This is for everyone.

The **affirming** kiss- 1 Samuel 10:1

The “**I’ve missed you**” kiss- Genesis 45:14-15

The “**trick your blind father”** kiss- Genesis 27:26-27

Someone has quipped, “There are five gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Christian...and some people never read the first four.

My prayer is that since we are being read and observed, let us be caught loving each other. Let’s give the watching world something worth watching and let us be a gospel worth reading.

Amen

1. R.V.G. Tasker in The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. P.191 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Attorney Glavin Responds to Independent Reviewer Report. governor.ny.gov [↑](#footnote-ref-3)