



Continuum of Care: God Always Follows Up
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
21st Sunday After Pentecost, Sunday, October 29th, 2017
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Continuum of Care is a concept used by many different industries. In the Healthcare world Continuum of Care means the treatment a person receives pre, during, and post their ailment. For instance, one summer evening a group of elementary students were playing outside. One of the older boys had built a skateboard ramp for the purposes of doing “really cool” tricks. Well, on that night the children decided they would just run and jump off of it with their shoes instead of a skateboard. All was going well until Ann jumped off it while trying to do a 360, a full spin. Somewhere in that middle of the rotation Ann got off balance and ended up coming down wrist first.

Immediately, all the other children knew that something was wrong. The look on Ann’s face told it all. Grabbing her elbow they noticed her wrist did not look right. There was a lump poking out in the wrong place. All the children scrambled, as they often do when something goes wrong, and Ann’s other brother quickly ran inside to call 911. Soon the ambulance showed up. The EMTs carefully guided Ann into the back of ambulance and accessed her injury. Clearly her wrist was broken so they took her to the hospital. There they informed the Emergency Room nurses of the situation. The nurses took her vitals, charted the injury, and got her settled into a room. The doctor came in with the chart in hand, looked over her wrist and prescribed the next step. The wrist would have to be set, then given time for the swelling to go down. Then a cast would have to be put on. Ann was given a temporary sling and discharged later that night with instructions to come back the next afternoon for the cast.

The following day Ann was back at the hospital getting a bright pink plaster cast on her wrist. Fortunately, over the next six weeks her arm healed well. Out of the cast and able to scratch all those itches that had accumulated, Ann did have to go through a couple of weeks of physical therapy to ensure everything was back to strength. All worked well and sometime later the doctor’s office call just to see how she was doing. At each phase of the process there were people around her to help her and to care for her: the 911 operator, EMTs, nurses, doctors, physical therapists, and a follow up phone call were all part the Continuum of Care she received.

Maybe you have a friend, a sibling, a parent, or a grandparent who has been helped by a Continuum of Care. I know my family has benefitted from it as my grandmother has taken a couple of tumbles lately and now she is routinely checked on.

Paul exemplifies what the Christian Continuum of Care ought to look like. In verse seven Paul uses the illustration of a nurse tenderly caring for their patient. Here, Paul is pointing out that as Christ followers we look after the physical well being of others. Those who are hungry, we feed. Those who thirst, we give water. Those who are homeless, we house. Those who are sick, we treat. For Paul to care is to make sure people have the physical goods they need to live.

Paul also points out in this passage that care is about spiritual well being as well. He went out into the world to share the superabundant love God has for all people. He stopped in the city of Thessalonica for a while and shared with them all about Jesus Christ. Not long after, he founded a church for the new Christians of Thessalonica, a place to learn and grow in faith. After the church was established and everything was going as it should, Paul continued on his mission trip. While he was away he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check in on them, making sure everyone was cared for and everyone was being civil to one another. Paul also wrote to them letters to encourage them in matters of hospitality and theology. As Paul said in the opening verses of 1 Thessalonians, he prayed for them all the time too. Paul understood the significance of continuing spiritual care.

We, however, should not lose sight of the fact that Paul was a human being and all people are broken. Genesis chapter three tells us when sin entered into the world everything broke, and all hearts now point away from God and towards sin. That means Paul modeled a great Continuum of Care, but he didn't care for the Thessalonians perfectly. There were probably times when they could have used another visit from him, but he did not show up. They may have benefitted from another letter or two, but they did not arrive. Brokenness means there were times when Paul missed an opportunity to journey with someone when they need it. No matter his brokenness he did not stop caring.

As members of First Federated Church we actively engage a Continuum of Care for one another, our community, and all of creation. In fact, we have vowed to do so. When a person is baptized and God's promises are sealed upon them, we, the church, are asked a couple of questions: do you promise to instruct this person by word and example in the truth of God's Word, and in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ? Do you promise to pray for this person and teach them to pray? Do you promise to

nurture them within the body of believers as citizens of Christ's kingdom? Those vows bind us to a Christian Continuum of Care. And so, we greet one another with kindness and encourage one another to press on and seek God's face both on Sunday mornings and every other day of the week. We also come alongside one another when someone is suffering, be it from a medical issue, the lose of a loved one, addiction, financial distress, or hurtful words, we listen to one another, we seek reconciliation, and pray for each other. We are also ever mindful that Christian Care extends to the physical well being of others.

Our care for one another isn't perfect, we will mess up more often than we want to admit, but the one true and living God, our God, never fails us. God always cares for, and us tends to us. We are witness to this truth in many ways. This morning, I want to draw our attention to one of them. The Words of Assurance, what is said right after the Prayer of Confession, reaffirms that only Jesus Christ is in a position to condemn and Christ has died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns for us, and Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone and the new life has begun. In Christ we know that we are forgiven. We are forgiven of our shortcomings, the times when instead of caring we are indifferent or instead of following up we walk away. Jesus does not stop caring about us because we get things wrong. Jesus always cares for us. He died for us. He rose for us. He reigns in power for us. He prays for us. I can think of no great care than that.

The Christian Continuum of Care Paul models and we practice doesn't ever come to an end. It is ongoing and we commit ourselves to it every time we answer the baptismal questions asked of us, every time we call Jesus our Lord and Savior, every time we profess our belief in God. There will be times when we don't get things rights, when we fail to care and fail to follow up. When we do, we seek forgiveness, and then keep on caring in the knowledge that God has, is, and will always care for us. When we hear the Words of Assurance we are reminded that God cares for us so much that Jesus Christ took our brokenness upon himself so that we are united with God forever.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.