

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:3-13. EHV 20th Sunday after Pentecost.

October 22, 2017.

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus. Amen.

Sometimes, it's just really hard to keep it together. There's always more to do at work than there is time to do it. It's hard to keep it together. The kids have so much stuff, is tonight volleyball or piano or karate, or all three? I can't remember. I don't know if I'm coming or going half the time. It's hard to keep it together. I'm in so much pain. They say I need surgery, but the surgery is dangerous. And I've got so much to do, I can't take two weeks off, not drive for six weeks! I'm losing it, here, I can't keep it together! Could you keep it together, if you had been thrown in prison, for helping a young lady? Could you keep it together if you had been blamed for a riot, simply because you were telling people the way to heaven? Could you keep it together if you had been beaten and whipped, literally, just because you wouldn't stop talking about Jesus? Wow! That just got a lot more real. That just really took on another level. The section of God's Word in front of us was written by a man named Paul. God gave him the strength to keep it together, through all that garbage I just described. Paul kept it together through all these awful things we read about. Paul had his heart open to Jesus. And Jesus kept it all together for Paul. With Jesus in your heart, with Jesus by your side, you can keep it together. Keep it together. Keep it together. Paul said, "We are not going to give anyone any cause at all to discredit our ministry." We don't want to do anything that would cause anyone to stumble in their faith, in any way. We will endure. We will put up with, we will keep it together, so no one can say anything bad about the service we do, or much more importantly, the one we serve, Jesus.

We show ourselves to be God's ministers. The word for show ourselves has that idea of keeping things together. We're keeping it together so that we can show ourselves as servants of God. We are keeping it together so people can see God sent us. We will endure anything we have to. You know endurance implies there is pain going on while you are enduring. In troubles and pressures and hardships and tight spots and torture and distress and situations we thought we could never get out of, God helped us keep it together. That's how we showed ourselves to be God's ministers.

Even in the worst things you could imagine. In beatings. Three times Paul was whipped with 39 lashes! Jesus only had to endure that once! One time people threw stones at Paul until they thought he was dead. And they left him for dead, literally! But God protected Paul and Paul got up and walked away like nothing had happened. In imprisonments. Read Acts chapter 16. Paul and his friend Silas were thrown in prison for an act of kindness. But the prison cell became an opportunity! They spoke God's Word. In prison. They sang hymns. In prison. And they got the opportunity to answer the most important question ever asked, in prison! "What must I do to be saved?" The answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved!" Once there was a riot. Paul was blamed for the riot because he was talking about Jesus. But it was an opportunity to speak God's Word. Paul was placed in front of the crowd. He told how Jesus changed his heart. He kept it together! Beatings and prison and riots were opportunities to show God's power. He kept it together!

He kept it together, even in hard work, until the point of exhaustion, sleepless nights, times of hunger. Seriously! He went without the basic needs of life, sleep and food, because his heart was so focused on Jesus. He was so concerned for every soul, he sometimes didn't sleep, sometimes didn't eat. Man, talk about a bright mirror to shine in my face, to show my sins. The day I studied for this sermon, some things popped up while I was in the office and I didn't get to eat lunch until 1 pm, instead of noon! Wow, do I have it rough. Do we really have to endure this stuff for God? No eating, no sleeping? We don't have it so bad. My son made a wise observation. I asked him, "How can there be so many shows on

Netflix?" His answer, "Netflix has one main competitor. Sleep." Yeah, we'll give up sleep for Netflix, but give up the day to sleep in for God? Eat supper at 8 pm for God? Yeah, we really have a hard time keeping it together, with all we have to endure. What a bright mirror of sin this shines in our faces. So how could Paul talk about purity, patience, kindness, sincere love? He had the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit pointed him to Jesus. The Holy Spirit showed him the perfect life Jesus had already lived in his place. The Holy Spirit showed him the life of Jesus, a life that said, "My food is to do God's will." And that life is not just an example to pile on more guilt. That life is our substitute. That perfect life is your life. That perfect life of Jesus is all God sees when he looks at you. That perfect life was draped over you by the Holy Spirit on the most wonderful day of your life. The Holy Spirit points you to Jesus, who forgives your failures, who remembers your lazy nights of Netflix no more, who removes your complaints about hunger as far as the east is from the west. You are perfect. In God's eyes. You are forgiven. In Jesus' blood. The Holy Spirit empowers you to keep it together, in the bad times and the good. Your real character, the real strength God has given you doesn't show up in the good times. It shows up in the bad times. It shows up in how you maintain purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, sincere love, even when all seems to be crumbling around you, even when you think you can't keep it together.

Look at what you have! The Word of truth. The Word of truth! God's Word is on your side and God's Word is absolute, eternal truth. Talk about courage. Talk about conviction. When you have the absolute truth of God's Word, you can keep it all together. You have the power of God, the power that cast out demons, that power that changed your status from sinner to saint, that changed your heart from hating God to loving him, that power is yours. You have weapons of righteousness on the right and the left. Usually a soldier carried his offensive weapon in the right hand and defensive shield on the left. You have the tools to attack Satan's lies: God doesn't love you! You have the tools to defend yourself: God couldn't love someone who did that! You have the tools to keep it together no matter what people say. Glory and dishonor, bad report and good report, treated as deceivers yet being honest, treated as unknown and yet being well known. Don't let people's opinions define you. Don't let people's opinions define you. Let God's love define you. Let your status as God's child define you. Let people give bad reports. You keep it together. It looks like we are dying, and yet look! We live! Look! We live! Paul was writing as one who had been stoned and left for dead, and yet he lived! Think of all the stuff you've been through and yet look! You are alive physically, today to be here. More importantly, you are alive spiritually and believe this word from God. Look! We live! And most importantly, we will live. Eternally. Does it really matter if people give us a good report on earth, when God has a perfect report on us in heaven? Does it really matter if people know us for a short time on earth, when God knows your name, forever, in heaven? Come on, keep it together!

Punished, but not put to death. Grieving, yet always rejoicing. Always rejoicing! Joy and rejoicing have to be better than happiness which comes and goes. We can always rejoice in the Lord and say it again, rejoice! We are poor, yet making many rich. What? Poor means to have nothing, be a beggar. That day might be coming, when those who keep it together and stand on God's Word will have to keep it together as beggars, outlawed by the government, facing prison for speaking the truth, beaten for sincere love. Yet we have and can pass on true riches, rich in faith, rich in love, rich in good works, rich toward God. Those are the true, lasting, eternal riches. Having nothing, yet possessing everything. This verse really made me stop. This verse is so powerful. If we could just live this verse and make this verse our motto and say this verse in trouble, we would always keep it together. Grieving, yet always rejoicing. Poor, yet making many rich. Having nothing and yet possessing everything. Grieving, yet always

rejoicing. Poor, yet making many rich. Having nothing and yet possessing everything.

Man, that's an open heart right there. Paul is really laying it all bare, speaking openly, from the heart to these beloved Corinthians. "We have plenty of room in our hearts for you!" Paul says. But you do not have room for us in your affections. Paul is speaking to his dear, dear children. He even uses a word that emphasizes the tender care and close affection a parent has for a child. Open your hearts wide too.

That can be tough. Open your heart and it could get hurt. It's easier to just check the score of the game after it's over, rather than watch every agonizing detail and see another season end in overtime. Again. It's easier to just stay distant. I opened my hearts to my dear children, but they've turned away from God, that really hurts. I opened my heart to a friend. Told them my deepest love for Jesus. And now? They hardly want to talk to me. It's tough to keep it together after that.

Can I get personal for a minute and call you my dear children? My heart really is standing wide open. I know we might only spend one hour together most weeks. But it's an hour where my heart is wide open, bringing you the most important news, the good news about Jesus, where my heart is wide open, showing us our sins, so Jesus can apply the only remedy for our sins: his love and forgiveness. I know it's scary to open your heart wide to Jesus. The people who follow Jesus might let you down. But Jesus won't let you down.

You can always be honest with me, have your heart wide open. Ask a question about the Bible!

Challenge me. Challenge God. Maybe you can't put it together. But the Holy Spirit will use God's Word to help us put it together. God will help us keep it together. Maybe you think of your family and say, "I just can't keep it together." In those troubles, hardships, difficulties, look to the word of truth. That's where God keeps it together. Maybe you've just had surgery. Can barely sit because of the pain, can't stand because of the pain, can't stand the medicine that's supposed to deal with the pain and you're thinking, "I can't keep it together." My dear children, open your heart to this part of God's Word of truth. All things work together for good, to those who love God. God is keeping your soul together. God will give you strength to keep it together. Open wide your heart to God. He's the strength to keep it together! Amen.