

**1 Peter 3: May 3, 2026**

**Acts 2:36-47, 1 Peter 3:8-12**

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There's something interesting about churches: when nothing changes, no one gets upset. As long as the same people sit in the same seats, sing the same songs, and follow the same rhythms, things feel stable—even healthy.

But the moment new people begin to arrive... really arrive... not just visit, but stay, belong, and reshape the life of the community—that's when we find out what kind of church we really are. Because growth doesn't just add numbers. It tests relationships. It stretches patience. It exposes whether we are truly a community—or just a group of people who happen to gather in the same place.

That's exactly the kind of situation Peter is speaking into in 1 Peter 3:8–12. When he says, "Finally," he's not wrapping up the letter—he's widening the lens. He's been addressing specific groups, but now he turns to everyone. This is about the whole church. This is about how believers live together, especially under pressure.

And pressure is key here. Peter is writing to communities under stress—social pressure, cultural opposition, misunderstanding, even hostility. And his concern is simple but profound: how do you live together in such a way that the community survives—and more than survives, that it becomes a witness to the power and life of Jesus Christ?

Peter writes: Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Other translations use the words "harmonious, compassionate, loving, tenderhearted, *and* humble." When the pressure mounts, pay attention, protect, and feed the relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Our tendency is to self-protect. But Peter is enlarging our vision - in Christ's church, we are on the same team. And God's team plays with humility, compassion, love, and harmony.

Now, that word "harmony" (or unity) can be misleading. Harmony doesn't mean uniformity. It doesn't mean everyone thinks the same, feels the same, or agrees on everything. Harmony is more like music—different notes, different parts, but held together in a shared direction. It's a kind of solidarity. A willingness to stay connected even when it's hard. Ordination vows of "to follow no divisive course, but to seek the peace and unity of Christ among your people and throughout the Holy Catholic Church."

But Peter is not naïve. Harmony is not the only value. Truth still matters. Faithfulness still matters. As one writer puts it, truth is not sacrificed on the altar of harmony—but often our personal preferences and feelings belong there.

So yes, we pursue unity—but not at the cost of Christ and the gospel. If something is deeply wrong, we don't ignore it for the sake of peace. But even when we address what's wrong, we do so as people marked by humility, compassion, and love. That's the tension.

And then Peter says something even harder: Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. That runs against every instinct we have. When someone hurts us, we want fairness. We want balance. We want things set right. But Peter says: respond with blessing. Not because injustice doesn't matter—but because God sees. God knows. God will judge rightly. And trusting that, gives believers a kind of steadiness—a refusal to be consumed by retaliation.

This doesn't mean passivity. It doesn't mean we never act. It doesn't mean we ignore harm or injustice. But it does mean that when we act, we are known for love, not vengeance. For peace, not hostility. Even when disruption is necessary, it is carried out in a way that reflects the character of Christ.

And then Peter grounds all of this in Scripture: "Those who desire to love life and see good days... let them seek peace and pursue it." Not just appreciate peace. Not just talk about peace. Pursue it. Chase after it. Because God is watching. "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer."

That's both comforting and sobering. Our life together matters to God. The way we speak to one another, treat one another, include—or exclude—one another... it all matters.

Now, if we want to see what this kind of community looks like in practice, we can turn to Acts 2. After Peter's sermon, we're told that about three thousand people were added. Overnight, the community changed. It grew rapidly, dramatically, and irreversibly.

And what did they do? "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." They shared life. They ate together. They worshiped together. They cared for one another's needs. There was generosity, joy, and a deep sense of belonging.

This wasn't easy. Imagine that kind of growth—three thousand new people, all with different backgrounds, habits, expectations. That kind of expansion doesn't just create excitement—it creates strain. And yet, they leaned into it. They became a community shaped not by comfort, but by commitment.

Which brings us back to us. Because every church faces this question: what happens when new people come? It's natural—even normal—for a child to feel threatened when a new sibling arrives. Suddenly, attention is divided. Things change. It feels like loss. But in the church, that instinct can't be allowed to take root. When new people enter the community, it's not a threat—it's a sign of life. A sign that God is at work.

And if we resist that... if we close in... if we cling to what's familiar at the expense of welcome... then we're not just protecting comfort—we're undermining the very nature of the church. Because the church is meant to expand. To welcome. To grow and be reshaped by the gifts of new people. That kind of community doesn't happen automatically. It takes work. It takes choosing sympathy when it would be easier to judge. Choosing humility when it would be easier to insist. Choosing love when it would be easier to withdraw.

And let's be honest—the church is not always easy to love. There's a tension between the ideal and the reality. The ideal is beautiful: a people devoted to God, marked by love, living in peace, reaching out to the world. The reality? Often messy. Imperfect. At times frustrating. We are, as someone once put it, a rather scruffy group of people—still learning, still growing, still in need of correction and grace.

And that's exactly why Peter's words matter. Because this kind of community doesn't emerge from perfection—it emerges from practice. From daily choices to bless instead of retaliate. To pursue peace instead of winning arguments. To treat one another not as obstacles, but as family.

There's a striking line from the novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky: "Hell is the suffering of being unable to love." If that's true, then the church is meant to be the opposite—a place where love is learned, practiced, and experienced. And here's the thing: love heals. It heals those who receive it—and it also heals those who give it.

But it doesn't come naturally. It must be cultivated. Worked at. Chosen again and again.  
When we meet someone new at coffee time and share our stories.  
When we invite someone for a walk to see how life is going.  
When we are upset about an issue, we take time to talk, study, and pray about it.  
When we are irritated, we seek to resolve the issue with the person, and not spread around gossip or offense.  
When we cannot see eye to eye, we pursue peace, who speak with care, who respond with blessing.  
When we differ, we share our commitment to Christ and seek his leading to harmony.  
When we are hurting from hostile forces, we turn to our brothers and sisters in Christ for comfort and support.

That's the kind of community Peter calls us to be. And it's the kind of community through which the gospel becomes visible.

Where the gospel isn't just something we say—but something we live. And that kind of church grows in depth, witness, beauty, and even numbers. And perhaps most importantly—it becomes a place where people don't just hear about the love of God... They actually experience it.