

Yelp, Wail, Hi-Lo, Whoop, Piercer, Thunder, Warble and Howler. Those may sound like a new generation of reindeer to pull Santa's sleigh, but they're different siren sounds available in police cars.

Perhaps you've noticed that not all police sirens sound alike. You may have discovered this, while hearing police cars on the road, or from watching cop movies or TV shows — and hopefully not because you were pulled over by an officer. Many police cars are equipped with more than one siren sound, each to be used in different circumstances and controlled by the responding officers.

Sirens function primarily to get police through traffic quickly in an emergency, or to get the attention of an individual offender. It's unlikely any of us enjoy hearing a siren, and we especially don't if we are the one it's aimed at.

Of course, as you might have guessed, not every police response requires a siren, and many police jurisdictions use a three-code system:

- Code 1: Respond to the call without using emergency lights or sirens.
- Code 2: Respond to the call with emergency lights, but without sirens.
- Code 3: Respond to the call with emergency lights and sirens.

But have you ever wondered how the siren sound affects the officers in the vehicle?

In responding on a website called *Quora*, to the question “How does it feel to drive a police car while the siren is on?” one officer said, “Exhilarating (high adrenaline), and at the same time VERY stressful.” (The stress is because of the erratic behavior of other drivers hearing the siren.) Another officer mentioned that the most commonly used police siren sounds each have a distinct physiological effect on the officer prior to even exiting the vehicle.

“The ‘wail’ is the tone that has the most calming effect,” the officer said, “and is the best one to use most often. The ‘yelp’ and ‘hi-lo’ will elevate heart rates and have officers ready to fight before they are even out of the car.” Of course,

police are trained to step over these feelings and handle their duties according to established protocols, but adrenaline-driven emotions are not easy to quell.

For the time being, let's forget about siren and flashing lights for a moment and take a look at our second lesson for today. The apostle Paul, in the first century of Christianity, is writing to the church at Philippi. He tells his readers that he appreciates their congregation for its faithfulness to the gospel.

But near the end of his letter, when Paul makes some personal remarks, he refers to a disagreement between two women in the Philippian church. Paul does not say what the disagreement is about — though presumably he knows — but he does mention the women by name and asks them to reconcile: “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.” He goes on to ask the church members to assist these women in coming together, and in the same sentence, he compliments both of them: “I ask you ... [to] help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

Now, there is no suggestion in the Bible that the church at Philippi had an ongoing problem with these two women. In all probability, the leaders in the congregation did as Paul urged and helped these women find fellowship with one another again. And because relationship conflicts are so common, it's worth our time to look at Paul's methodology in today's narrative. After all, there are times in life when we sometimes find ourselves in a position to assist friends or family members who are at odds with one another.

First, Paul doesn't come roaring in with siren blaring and flashing lights. You might say his letter requires a Code 1 response as far as he is concerned. He doesn't complicate the problem by adding adrenaline to it.

Second, Paul shares no gossip about the conflict. One reason that we don't know what these two women disagreed about is because Paul didn't describe it in

the letter. It is one thing to talk directly to the parties involved about an issue, or even discuss it with an advisor, but it is quite another to put it out there for everybody to know. When the problem is common knowledge, it is that much harder for the disagreeing parties to get past it.

Third, Paul doesn't take sides. In reading all his New Testament letters, it's clear that he is a man of strong opinions, and also one to confront sin for what it is. But the conflict here, whatever its cause, is between two individuals whom Paul considers good people, and he does not champion one over the other. He doesn't describe one person as good and the other as bad, and he doesn't label one right and one wrong. Instead, he preserves the integrity and reputation of the two women. He mentions that they have worked faithfully alongside him in the work of the gospel. *Praise* for the women, rather than any gossip about their controversy, is what he shares with the congregation.

When we fail to consider that someone may have good motives — even though we disagree with them, or they're butting heads with someone else, we risk seeing that person as a distorted caricature and often miss who they really are.

Several years ago, two groups in the Christian publishing world found themselves at odds. One group was planning to come out with an inclusive-language version of the NIV Bible, but the other publisher believed that to do so was to tamper with the Scriptures. The second publisher aired this view in one of its publications, and the first publisher responded with a press release, and soon the debate became quite heated and was carried on in magazine articles and internet postings.

After the debate grew angry, the Evangelical Press Association, to which both parties belonged, was asked to investigate whether the EPA code of ethics had been violated. The EPA declined to render a judgment, but it concluded: "We regret ... that the rhetoric of the debate ... often seemed to lack charity and the

debaters sometimes appeared more interested in winning arguments than in pursuing truth.” The EPA statement referenced an essay where the authors urged conflicting groups to carry on their debates with clarity and charity. “By charity,” they wrote, “we have in mind mainly the good will that avoids caricature and seeks to state others’ views in ways they would approve. ... By clarity we mean the use of language that expresses as fully as possible what we affirm and what we deny.”

“Avoiding caricature” is a way of saying that we don’t characterize people as “bad” simply because they see things differently from how we or others do. With that being the case, perhaps the lesson we can learn from Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians is that we should not take his words to mean that all controversy must be avoided, whether in the church or in our personal relationships. After all, disagreements expressed with mutual respect, in honesty and good faith, with courtesy and humility, have the potential to improve things.

One pastor says that a bride-to-be put the matter of disagreeing in good faith plainly to him in a pre-marriage counseling session. One thing the pastor usually talked with couples about before marriage was the concept of fighting fair. He maintained that virtually all couples have disagreements, so rather than try to pretend they don’t exist, it is important to learn how to disagree about issues without seeing the other person as bad or wrong. When the pastor introduced the idea of fighting fair, the bride-to-be spoke up and said that in her previous marriage, she and her husband had decided that they were not going to fight at all. “And we didn’t,” she said, “but as a result, a lot of stuff that we needed to talk about never got discussed, and the marriage fell apart.” Then she grabbed the hand of the man she was now marrying, and said, “This time, we’re going to fight so that this marriage will work.”

That same reality applies to any relationship — even between church members — in which the parties have invested themselves emotionally. But one of

the key rules for fighting fair in marriage also applies elsewhere: stay focused on the subject of the disagreement, rather than on the person with whom you disagree. In other words, “I disagree with your position, but I am not thinking therefore that you are a bad person.” This is a view that can be called “charity.” Paul was far enough removed from the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche that he could see the conflict for what it was: a clash of ideas, not a battle between a good person and a bad one. Thus, Paul speaks charitably of the good work for the gospel that both women had done.

Paul keeps the lights and siren off with his low-key language. He doesn’t spread any gossip, doesn’t take sides, and doesn’t charge in with a Code 2 or Code 3 response that could aggravate the situation. The resolution he offers is to urge responsible people in the church — those already knowledgeable about the conflict — to help the women. And while it can be uncomfortable for people not involved in a controversy to mediate, there are times when people who are trusted and respected by both sides can assist warring individuals to get past the issue that has separated them. Paul knew there were people like that in Philippi, and he urged them to help.

And finally, Paul asks Euodia and Syntyche to come together around one thing: “to be of the same mind in the Lord.” He is calling the two women, indeed the whole church including us today, to rally around the things of God, to have the humility of Christ, and on that common ground, to find a place where even those with seemingly irreconcilable differences can stand in fellowship together. And for those of us trying to help people deal with conflict, let’s try to keep it at Code 1 (without the sirens, flashing lights, or drama) but with care and compassion instead. Amen.