

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Prayer of the Day:

O Lord, your ears are always open to the prayers of your humble servants, who come to you in Jesus' name. Teach us always to ask according to your will that we may never fail to obtain the blessings you have promised; through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. (John 6:68)

Sermon:

"Unity", it's a word that many make much of these days. Maybe it's because of a growing awareness in a lack of unity in the world around us. It's easy to bring the fractures to the forefront. You can do it with very few words in most cases. Republican or Democrat, rich or poor, white-collar or blue, boy or girl, child or adult, happy or sad, slave or free, and no, we have not even begun to discuss the wedges that can exist simply because of races and places. It almost would seem that the more we scream tolerance, the more intolerant we become – which for the record is an accurate depiction of the sinful nature which will always do "B" when "A" is demanded. Yet as we turn our attention to our lesson today, Paul tells the Ephesians that they need not search for "Unity". They already have it. It was given to them when God called them into faith, it unites people across every aspect of the earthly dividers we have come to know. It's a precious gift, which God has given that we might have companionship when the storms of life blow over us, but it's also quite fragile. It can be lost so easily and so as Paul discusses **THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH** today, he also reminds us that **IT REQUIRES CONSTANT VIGILANCE**.

While we hear words like "love", "faith" and "grace" in our lesson today, the truth is that there is an awful lot of Law contained in these words as well. Consider the first three verses, "*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*" Live up to the calling given you! Be humble and Gentle, Be patient and bear with one another (not half heartedly to earn a brownie point or two) but in love (want to, not have to kind of talk here). Oh, and as we do all of this, there is a goal in mind, that we preserve the spiritual unity given to us That's not the comfort of the Gospel which proclaims "it is finished and you are saved" that's law which says "do it or else."

What's the "or else" in this case? Well, if we can do all of this God says, ¹⁴ *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by*

every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. So don't do it and, well, it goes to reason that none of that occurs.

So then what are we really saying here today? Well it's not overly difficult is it? God has given us that often sought after but seldom seen unity and He expects us to preserve such a gift. How? Not with the politically correct speech of the world around us that screams tolerance in the face of truth but not with the hatemongering of the hysterical hypocrite either. Rather God would have us cling to His pure truth, His Word, even as we hold it out to others around us.

You see that's where so many fall off the train tracks of true unity. Paul reminds us, ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* It all begins and ends with God! To step away from His clear Word is to step outside of the spiritual unity He has given through His gift of faith. We can't overlook scriptural truth for the sake of this unity or the unity is already lost, just as it is lost when we attack those who are already united with us in the bond of faith.

If you are anything like me, all of this seems a bit baffling. Not because it's too difficult to comprehend but because it is so difficult to do. God is in effect telling us not to step to the right or to the left here but rather keep our feet on that narrow middle road. It's not unlike trying to perform on the balance beam in the Olympics, which I'm relatively sure would result in massive pain for most of us. It's for this reason that God reminds us that we do not undertake this task alone. Instead by His grace, the Church is united and by His grace it remains that way.

Reconsider those Words we just quoted. ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* The one body, is clearly revealed as the Invisible Church in verses 15 and 16 of our lesson, the one spirit is probably best understood as the common heart and mind shared by those who are focused on the one hope of an eternal home in heaven. All given as the Holy Spirit called, gathered and enlightened His Church, when He gave us His unity. Verse five is not all that different, Jesus is the Lord of the Church or as He says it later in our lesson He is the head and the church is the body ... That means He calls the shots. That's unifying because faith will now rally the Church around that Lord through the means of grace (the gospel in Word and sacraments), Baptism here a good poster child as the common way all enter this one true faith. So again as we said before this unity is enjoyed strictly because of the work of God.

It, therefore, makes sense that if we wish to remain steadfast or vigilant in this unity of faith, we would use the very same things that established it. So God has established the public ministry for the edification of the Church. Shepherds (Pastors and Teachers) for the flock with the intent that as they grow in faith, they will lead others to the fold through the very means which strengthen them for the task. As the Church grows in the truths of God's Word, then the unity is preserved. Then and then alone will the storms of this life not sway our teachings but allow us to remain rock-solid in the truth and provide an anchor for others who might feel tossed about.

Of course, you and I live with ourselves every day. We know that we don't always stand as mighty oaks of righteousness unswayed by the winds of false teaching and deceit. More often we look like the infant tossed about by the trials and temptations of life. More often than not, we find ourselves living in a false unity for the sake of worldly ease than standing in the truth and allowing others to learn of lasting unity through the Word God has given us.

Oh, but that's when it's so important to understand that as we stand, Yes, even as we sway God grace abounds. He draws us back to the true unity He has given through saving faith in Him. There in His Word, His suffering and death on Calvary's cruel cross cleanses us from sin, His perfection restores our confidence in the continuing unity we enjoy with our Father and heaven, His resurrection screams victory in the face of our defeats. Only then, as the Word heals our wounds and strengthens our faith, is the body of Christ continually built up. It's this continuous cycle that repeats itself until we *attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* in the lasting glory of heaven. Yes, *as we speak the truth in love* (which requires holding to the truth in all its purity), *we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.* ¹⁶ *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

"Unity", often sought, seldom found. It is a gift that God gives His church through faith in Jesus Christ. It is a gift he preserves us in until the end. Because **THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH** is so precious **IT REQUIRES CONSTANT VIGILANCE**. Because we could never attain it or retain it on our own **IT REQUIRES THE GRACE OF GOD**. Amen!