

“United In Spirit”
“That We May Be One”

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Key Text: Ephesians 4:1-16

I. Introduction: Thoughts on Unity and Harmony

What is it that ties us together as the Body of Christ? Especially in an age of growing diversity, growing divisiveness and growing disunity. We have discovered Jesus clearly wants his disciples and his church to be one just as he and his Father God are one.

Paul continues to push this idea in each of his letters to the churches to whom he writes:

In Phil 2:2 he states:

“then make my joy complete, having the same love, being one in spirit and mind and purpose...”

In I Cor 1:10:

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, that you all agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

Col 3:13-14:

“Bear with each other, forgive each other...And over all these virtues put on love that binds them all together.”

Romans 12:16:

“Live in harmony with each other. Do not be proud, associate with people of low position and do not be conceited.”

Even good ole Peter chimes in I Peter 3:8:

“Finally, all of you be like minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.”.

II. Paul’s Thoughts on Unity in Ephesians 4

Paul’s focus here in Ephesians 4 actually is his largest discourse on unity.

He begins with challenging us to remember our calling in Christ Jesus. Our motivation to work toward unity grows out of our call. We each make a commitment when we become part of the church to be Christ’s representative in the world. If you have accepted Jesus and became a Christian, this is what you signed on for.

Paul continues here in Ephesians by giving a similar list of spiritual qualities we should be striving for. It’s similar to the Fruit of the Spirit list in Galatians. Except he chooses to use the word “completely” leading into this. Be completely—wholly—all the way, totally humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with each other in love. This is the only way we will ever reach a place of unity, be able to accomplish anything together, and find peace in our hearts.

III. Can Unity be Manufactured?

Paul says in vs 3:

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

So, you see unity is not just going to pop up out of the ground. Paul instructs us— “make every effort”. That, to me, means we are going to have to focus on it, work on it, be self-aware of how we relate to, listen to and speak with each other.

Sure, I get that we cannot manufacture unity. The Holy Spirit has to be a big part of the mix. We have to get to places to talk about it, pray about it, lay our agendas down. We have to focus on Jesus and not on ourselves. But we do! We focus on ourselves, our rights, our needs way too much.

Let me ask you, who is the head of the church? Our Bishop, our District Superintendent, the Pope, Randy or Lauren? We hope not! Christ is the head of the Body of Christ. Jesus is our leader. Jesus gives us our marching orders.

And in this, Paul explains we each have gifts and talents and roles to play.

Paul points out there is:

One Lord,

One Spirit,

One baptism,

One God and Father of all, who is our “All in All”.

IV. Paul Helps Order the Church

And God has ordered the church in such a way that we all have gifts to offer to help the church grow and build itself up in love.

Again, Paul offers lists of spiritual gifts in various locations in his letters. In Eph 4 he lists five, which are:

Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers.

The church needs people operating in each of these areas and the other 15 plus areas of spiritual giftedness to be effective and to be unified.

People who tend to step up and serve often feel overwhelmed because they are trying to do too much. Some of the Body is working while other parts of the Body are lagging behind or are not doing anything. It causes disunity in the Body when the Body is not functioning together. It is a challenge to any group, team, choir, orchestra, or work place group if a member of the team suddenly gets sick, hurt, or has a life-altering experience. The team has to figure out how to adjust. My experience is sometimes it can, sometimes it can't.

I was watching a ball game the other day when one of the team's best players got a hit, tried to round first to go to second and came up lame. He'd pulled a hamstring and was out of the game. His team struggled, he struggled to play on and the team lost. When that muscle or ligament did not function properly it effected his body and performance and it impacted the whole team.

All the gifts or functions of the Body Paul speaks of here are crucial to the Body of Christ functioning well, serving well, worshipping well and in finding a place of unity.

We need every part of the Body working together to carry out the mission God has given us as a Body of Christ at CUMC. And as we speak this truth in love, this is what will help us grow up—Paul says, “mature in faith, into Him, Jesus who is the head”.

V. How Jesus Thinks This Unity Thing Works

And in the Gospels, Jesus' first sermon gets at the heart of what it will take to come to places of unity no matter where you find yourself.

The first 3 Beatitudes lead us to the place of humility. The poverty of spirit, the mourning of our own sin, and the call of Christ to be meek.

1. **Humility** Friends, we move towards unity when we each choose to be the change when we recognize we each are part of the problem. The first step is humility. When we sing, we can all sing in unison—unity—but when four parts are added: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, the choir, the praise team—they are all still one, just each sharing their part to make something beautiful, No one tries to over sing, under sing. They blend their voices, they blend instruments and what comes out is good and pleasant. “O how good and pleasant it is when God’s people dwell in unity”, says the Psalmist in Psalm 133:1.

So, humility, working together, using our gifts, being patient and gentle and bearing with each other in love is a first big step toward unity.

2. **Called to Be Different** Second, just know the call of God on our lives is for us to be different and set apart in this world. Some say, “in the world, but not of the world”. The problem is there are issues we tend to focus more on than on the mission of Jesus. A lot of Methodist churches are waiting around to see where the denomination is going to land on the issue of human sexuality come March 1, after our special called General Conference the end of February. Pray for those attending conference. Work towards the mission Jesus calls us to, to make disciples.

Have you ever thought about “Blessed are the righteous” as not about having a so called right position on an issue? I mean the right position is not to murder, or beat, or tear down, or smash.

Jesus challenges us to go deeper. To become mature. Righteousness is not about being right, it is about being reconciled and talking with each other and working out differences. Do I think everyone will ever agree about everything? I’m not that naïve. We are called as ambassadors of God to be reconciled not only to God, but to each other and there will be no unity unless that happens.

3. **The Call to Be Peacemaker** Oh, and we all need help here because you do realize how easy it is to turn from peacemaker to war monger, right? Just be riding along in the car and let a person, or two, or three cut you off, pull out in front of you and give you some unkind sign.

A pastor friend of mine who was fighting in Iraq. His troop was continually being shelled by mortar fire. He asked one of his very gifted intelligence officers why they were having so much trouble finding the people launching the ordinances against them. The officer replied, “The problem is 23 hours and 58 minutes out of the day these guys are farmers. For the other 2 minutes, they’re terrorists.

It doesn’t take long for any of us to go from peacemakers to war mongers. Oh, and I can spend 23 hours a day working for peace and unity and reconciliation and in a moment my heart can be at war again. At war with my wife, kids, neighbors, church family, the world. Does that ever happen to any of you?

So, here’s what I have to remember when my heart wants to go to war.

1st, I am not called to be a peacemaker because I always feel like peacemaking because others have earned peace, because sometimes the other is actively trying to wage war.

2nd, I am not called to be a peacemaker because I always feel like peacemaking, because I don’t.

3rd, I am called to be a peace maker and work toward unity because I have been adopted by a Father who longs for peace and unity, to be One with us and for us to be One with each other and One in ministry, so that the whole Body, the Church, can grow and build itself up in love.

VI. Unity Comes Through Humility Reconciliation, and the Bond of Peace

The One who gave His life for you and me has come for this world. God loves the world. We do not give up because the volume, the incendiary rhetoric, the accusations, the rights become too loud.

God loves all the parties, all the races, every tribe and every color, rich, poor, and everywhere in between. God loves you, too!

There has to be something greater than a political party that unites us and there is. Jesus and Paul tell us when we make peace we are Children of God. Don't miss it friends.

The unity of the Spirit only comes through the bond of peace. Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called children of God. Will you make every effort to work for and keep the Unity of Spirit?

VII. Closing Prayer

Let us Pray:

God, we will admit it is often easier to war with each other than to sit and talk, listen to and work out our differences. That's true in our homes, schools, neighborhoods and communities, in our church, our world and sometimes within our own selves.

And yet we know also you have called each of us to something higher. It may not be easy to be humble and patient, gentle and forbearing with one another in love because we often do see things differently. How do we see through your eyes, Jesus? To feel with your heart? To understand with your mind?

Give us courage to not give up or give in as your people. Help us lead, love, and learn with Christ-like character. Help us grow up and mature together so You can help us fulfill the work You have for us to do as Your church Body here at CUMC.

In Jesus' Name,

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Amen.