

Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16

Pentecost 10, August 1, 2021

God created people to be together. He had finished creating this world. When everything was just right, he placed Adam and Eve into his creation. Even in the way he created Adam and Eve showed that. He first placed Adam into this world. He had all the animals pass by him for Adam to name them. But his real purpose in having Adam name the animals was to help him realize: **“But for Adam no suitable helper was found.”** (Genesis 2:20) He then created Eve so that the two could be one. God loved to be around Adam and Eve. In the cool of the evening, God would often walk through the Garden of Eden with them. Even after they lost that perfect relationship with God, he still brought people together into families. As the number of people grew in the world, friendships would be formed. People would come together around the Word of God. God’s design was for people to be together. Yet, sin divides and Grace unites us.

In a sense, that is the central message of the book of Ephesians. Sin divides and Grace unites. For the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul teaches us that we have been adopted into God’s family. This adoption was done, not because of what we have done but by what Christ has done. It is through that adoption that we have been united to Christ. As God gathers people into his family, he brings the most unlikely people together. What unites the Church is not an ethnic background like Jew or Gentile. It is not united because of different classes like poor or rich. It is not united by race. The Church is united in and by Christ.

This unity is a gift granted to us in the one baptism and one calling that comes from the one Spirit of the one Lord from the one Father over everything. It is a unity which not only has a present reality, but a future as we are united by one hope in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other Lord or idea or identity marker that brings us together and makes us one. It is through Word and Sacrament that it is sustained.

Paul now begins to talk about how that unity in Christ looks like in everyday life. Paul describes that. **“¹As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”** Even though Paul is imprisoned, it doesn’t change the relationship that he has with these Christians in Ephesus. The outward circumstances in life doesn’t change the relationship that we have with God and each other. Yet, even though that is true, Satan will use whatever he can to break that relationship. So, Paul writes: **“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”** This is harder to do than it sounds, isn’t it? This is the exact opposite as to how we are by nature. Sin divides the relationship that we have in God and with each other.

It is easy to get so wrapped up in what is happening in our lives that we lose touch with how important it is to be involved in the lives of others to help them remain one in Christ. Paul urges us to live a life worthy of our calling by being humble and gentle and patient. He calls on us to bear with each other in love. Yet, being part of the body of Christ is truly something special. **“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”** It is Christ that makes us one. God desires spiritual unity and spiritual oneness.

For one of my devotions this week at the LGP camp that I was at, I had the girls bring their flashlights along. Even though it was daytime, I had them turn on their lights. I asked them to think about what if there were 1,000 flashlights on, 10,000 and 100,000 and a million and a billion people with lights on that hill. The answers were great. My encouragement was for them to think of how they are part of all those lights shining for Jesus out there in the world. You and I are part of all those lights in the world.

As we think about that, then these words of Paul are really a treasure. **“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”** What a team we are on. What makes a good team? A

good team doesn't just take talented individuals, it takes unity. As the church, we are part of a very prestigious team: the Body of Christ. This team needs one another. Each member of the church has been gifted to support the rest.

As that happens, then these words of Paul are such a comfort for his Church, his believers: **“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 people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of 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.”**

The good news in all of this, Jesus has not left us to create unity with other Christians or in our own congregations. He has won the victory over the Devil who would seek our division from God and one another. You and I are the receivers of Christ's victory. Sin divides, but Grace unites.

We join in saying with the Apostle Paul: **“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”** Why? We are chosen and adopted children of God. We are united by Christ. Since we are united, we continue to focus our minds and hearts together to share the message of Jesus. May God grant it. Amen.