

SERMON 3RD – 4TH MAY 2008

JOHN 17: 1 – 11.

UNITY IN CHRIST:

PICTURE A COUPLE OF COMIC STRIP CHARACTERS. One is sitting alone, watching television. In storms the other, demanding that he change the channel to show the one she wants to watch, threatening him with her fat little fist in his face. Rather meekly he asks her what makes her think she can walk in and take over. She blurts out: “These five fingers!” which she tightens into a fist. It works. Without a word the little guy responds by asking which channel she prefers.

Naturally, she gets to watch any channel she wants. Slowly, he slips out of the room, feeling like a wimp. He looks at his own five fingers and asks, “Why can’t you guys get organized like that? To be organised is to be in unity.

In our Gospel reading this morning we have Jesus’ prayer for his disciples as he prepares both himself & them for his departure from this life and he prays that all he has done will glorify his Heavenly Father. In verse 11 of the prayer Jesus states that he will remain in the world no longer, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – **SO THAT THEY MAY BE ONE as YOU AND I ARE ONE.**

By ‘them’ Jesus is referring to his Disciples plus the many other followers and believers who were with him. Just as Jesus had been one with the Father he was asking the Father to enable them to be one with Him also.

Jesus is talking here of being in unity with God through their faith in himself as the Christ and their acceptance of his ways.

This unity is both a corporate unity and an individual unity. Corporate unity is for the body of Christ the church. When Jesus sent out his disciples he said go and make disciple who would become a single body of believers. He did not say make Anglicans, Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, he said tell people about me so that they would come into fellowship with God through their acceptance of my life, death & resurrection and the price that I paid for them.

Further in this chapter of John verses 21 – 23 we read “....that they may be one as you and I are one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.....23. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world will know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me”.

This sounds to me like a united approach from Jesus and his Heavenly Father, a united approach that he wanted his followers to be part of. For it is in unity that our preaching of the word by speaking and doing that touches people.

¹⁰Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters,[£] by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose

In the sporting world, especially in the area of team sports, a team needs to operate as a unit for it to be effective and competitive. A team in which the members play as individuals usually fails. A well used military tactic is to divide your opposition either by physically drawing troops away or by dividing them from within through distrust, misinformation and disinformation causing doubt.

I look around our church and see very few newcomers, especially the younger generations. They come seeking but do not stay. Is this because we are not in unity with God or each other as the body of Christ in this place? Are we too concerned about what we want in our services etc, and not what God wants us to have.

Also we read in the press of the possible split in the Anglican Communion plus our history here in Port Macquarie of Church splits is well know. Only recently another split happened and another church opened its doors as a result. So is it this lack of unity in the body that is preventing people from coming into the kingdom. If it is we will have much to answer for when we face God on judgement day.

Our enemy Satan dose not mind how many new churches spring up for it continues to keep the division that is in the Body of Christ and he knows that whilst we are divided we are not as effective as we are meant to be.

Unfortunately we tend to cover these wounds in the body of Christ with thin appeals to personal preference: "There is a church out there for everyone; if we don't suite join one that fits you best, choose a style that works for you." This approach seems to show disunity and be at odds with our calling to go into the world and to make disciples and to feed God's sheep who have come to us.

However in the bible this laissez-faire attitude is a contradiction of the Gospel. We read again in verse 11 where John recounts the words of Jesus".....Holy Father, protect them in your name.....so that they can be one, as we are one". Jesus is specifically asking God, to protect the unity of his followers and to guard us against division so that the world may believe.

This language of Jesus may seem to be in circles, however as the relationships are untangled it becomes clearer: the unity of Christ's followers is not incidental to our salvation. As we are made one with Christ so we are made one with the Father. But we are one with Christ if we are one with each other. Our Fellowship with God depends upon our unity, as does our witness to the world – we are one – so that the world may believe.

Also for us to be in unity with God through Christ as a body and we each need to be in unity with God through Christ individually. This unity is achieved by following God's commands once you come into fellowship and acceptance of him. That means

putting of all slanderous talk, getting rid of any lingering unforgiveness to anyone, by not committing adultery. By this I am not just referring to extra marital affairs, I am referring to any thing in you life that adulterates you relationship with God. In Isaiah 1: 21, Ezek.23:4,7,37, Hosea & Revelations we read of spiritual adultery – idolatry, covetousness and apostasy. In other words anything that adulterates your relationship with God the Father!

The dictionary refers to adulterate as being anything that corrupts, debases or makes impure by adding a foreign or inferior substance. I.e. you adulterate milk when you add vinegar to it. So anything that you allow into your life that is not of God and in accordance with his way adulterates your relationship with him and causes you to not in unity with him.

Thus if we as individuals are not in unity with God through Christ how can our churches be in unity for we bring our baggage to the table of fellowship! Disunity can also be seen as a form of rebellion and if we are in rebellion we are outside of God's Kingdom.

In J. R. R. Tolkien's book *The Fellowship of the Ring* includes an evocative scene that failed to make it into the movie. The eight who accompany the ring bearer on his journey are men, hobbits, dwarves and elves. In order to defeat the power of the Dark Lord, these historically divided groups must endeavor to work together for a common goal. As the fellowship approaches Lothlórien, an elven region, the elven guard refuses to let Gimli the dwarf pass without a blindfold. The resulting tension threatens to divide the fellowship. But Aragorn, the group's leader, suggests that if one of them must face this indignity, they will all go blindfolded. Legolas the elf protests: "Alas for the folly of these days! Here all are enemies of the one Enemy, and yet I must walk blind, while the sun is merry in the woodland under leaves of gold!"

"Folly it may seem," says Haldir. "Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dais/Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him."

We need today take a lesson from Tolkien's wisdom. The forces of darkness that oppose the ways of God draw strength from the disunity of God's people. As mentioned before Satan loves to see the Body of Christ divided and without unity and rendered ineffectual in winning souls for the Kingdom. Our calling is not only to proclaim God's reconciliation but also to live it and live it in unity.

Lacking unity, our mission to the ends of the earth will appear redundant, reinforcing a division that the world already knows. Better all blindfolded than only one; better yet, all eyes open to the God who makes us one.

So what in your life causes you to be out of unity with God and the way he want's you to live? When people see you do they see Christ in you, or do they see the Gossip, the liar, the hypocrite, Has he revealed to you a ministry that he wants you to be involved in and you have turned you back, has he asked you to change the way you do things or relate to people and you have said no I want to do it my way. What

ever is in the way of your relationship with God, repent of it and ask God's help in dealing with it so that you can be in sync with God and enjoy that close personal relationship with God that Christ died so that you could have.

Laborers Together

An old legend tells of a noisy carpenter's shop in which the tools of the trade were arguing among themselves. Brother Hammer was told by his fellow tools that he would have to leave because he was too noisy. To which he replied, "If I am to leave this carpenter's shop, Brother Gimlet must go too; he is so insignificant that he makes very little impression."

Little Brother Gimlet arose and said, "All right, but Brother Screw must go also; you have to turn him around and around again and again to get him anywhere."

Brother Screw said, "If you wish, I will go. But Brother Plane must leave also; all his work is on the surface, there is no depth to it."

To this Brother Plane replied, "Well, Brother Rule will have to withdraw if I do, for he is always measuring others as though he were the only one who is right."

Brother Rule then complained against Brother Sandpaper and said, "I just do not care, he is rougher than he ought to be and he is always rubbing people the wrong way."

In the midst of the discussion, the Carpenter of Nazareth walked in. He had come to perform His day's work. He put on His apron, and went to the bench to make a pulpit. He employed the screw, the gimlet, the sandpaper, the saw, the hammer and the plane and all the other tools. After the day's work was over and the pulpit was finished, Brother Saw arose and said, "Brethren, I perceive that all of us are laborers together with God."

Is it not wonderful how God uses all of us and our unique gifts in the building of His pulpit!

Eph 4:15-16 (NRSV)¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Brothers & Sisters once we are united with God as individuals then you and I can bring that unity into our fellowship as the Body of Christ, a unity that will be evident to all as we live a Christ like life, and be effective in the preaching of the word and the making of disciples for God.

I encourage you to not delay in restoring your unity with God and each other, repent of your sinfulness and of your rebellion and do so today for tomorrow may be too late..

In the Name of Father, Son & Holy Spirit:

Amen

Mike Perrott