

A UNITED STATE
Psalm 133; Ephesians 4:1-6

(Read Ephesians 4:1-6)

Intro: A fire destroyed Palmyra Brethren in Christ Church building on New Year's Day, 1958. That was a Wednesday, but they never missed a service, because beginning on the following Sunday, and until a new building was completed, the Palmyra BIC congregation worshiped in the Palm Lutheran Church building which is just a few blocks east of their location on the same street. The good people of the Lutheran Church opened their hearts and their building to the good people of the BIC Church. *How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!* Psalm 133:1 (The Message)

In February 2007 Chaplain Don Earlenbaugh of Samaritan Hospital had major heart surgery and was unable to provide his usual consistent and Spirit led pastoral care to the patients there. Two pastors from this Ashland Community set about immediately to make sure that every day for six weeks was covered with pastoral care at the hospital. Pastors from all around the community stepped in to help their brother in Christ. *How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!* Psalm 133:1 (The Message)

In the Spring of 1989 the little, financially struggling Speedwell Heights BIC Church desperately needed a new roof. So one Saturday morning 50 men and women from BIC churches for miles around crawled up on that roof, tore off the old shingles and replaced them with new shingles, all by a little after noon. *How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!* Psalm 133:1 (The Message)

In January of 2015 I had hip replacement surgery and was laid up for the better part of six weeks. At the same time my mother's declining condition took a turn for the worse and, after lingering for about two weeks, she died. The preachers and deacons of this wonderful congregation stepped in and provided pastor care and pulpit supply in my absence. And the pastors in this community, a number of them, came and visited with me, and prayed with me, and all asked me a version of the question, "How can we help you?" *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* Ephesians 4:4-6 (NIV)

There is nothing like the Church. There is nothing like the Church united. There is no more formidable weapon for the transformation of the world than the Church in a united state. And that is why Satan does all he can to tear it apart. But we must not and cannot allow him to do it.

The two texts we've heard this morning from Psalm 133 and Ephesians 4 attest to the power of unity and I want to take the next few minutes that we have here this morning to solidify in our minds the need for Christ Followers to walk in unity.

Now, mind you, I do not think that ABCers are not united. We do indeed really get along well. We are formidable little band of brothers and sisters with a singlemindedness that is beautiful. But I want us to not only continue that but also take leadership in the culture in which we live and work to model the unity of the Spirit.

You see, as we look at our scripture . . .

Anything less is less than God's plan

- Looking at Ephesians 4.1-6, the plain truth is this is how we must live in light of the calling of Jesus. In other words, if you are a Christ follower you need to act like it. Fussing and fighting is not a good representation of being a Christ follower. It's sad for me to say, but it's true, that all too often what the world sees in infighting in the church. Like junior highers flocking to a tussled in the middle of the cafeteria, chanting, "Fight! Fight!" the world looks with glee at Christian tussles over the smallest and most minute issues – or even worse, worldly political disagreements. This is a travesty! It grieves the heart of the heavenly father and makes the evil one rub his hands with delight.
- Commenting on the passage, Archibald Hunter, writes, "*Having appealed for unity, Paul now declares the religious basis on which this unity rests. Seven times he repeats the word one, each time attaching it to a different noun. The result is a sevenfold battle cry of Christian unity. Note how this foundation for unity begins in the unity of the Church, goes on to the unity of Christ, and culminates in the unity of God.*" Seven times the word "one" is used. Perhaps you remember that in Biblical thinking seven is the perfect number. So Paul makes sure he incorporates it here.

- Hunter goes on to point out that Paul's words even more timely 2000 years later, as we struggle for the church's unity and all too aware of our unhappy divisions. But he goes right to the positive that, even though we should fight disunity, we should never “. . . *forget the things on which Christians over the world are united. All Christians of all races worship the same God and Father. All confess Christ as Savior and Lord. All share the same hope of salvation.*” no matter what form of worship they use. This is powerful!
- So the unity of the Church is rock solid and each Christ Follower has the admonition to avoid whatever in word or deed would break it. The Church by its very nature is one and anything less is less than God's plan.
- It's the plan of peace. Ephesians 4:3 tells us we must be *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. It is our responsibility, with the help of the Holy Spirit be in harmonious relationship. Paul points this out elsewhere when he writes, *If possible, SO FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU, live peaceably with all*. Romans 12:18. Notice I snuck some emphasis in there . . . It depends on us. The Church is supposed to guard the oneness that Jesus brought by being one in the Body of Christ.
- Anything less than unity is less than God's plan. You see, peace is the native language of Christ Followers. F. F. Bruce writes concerning verse 3 “*Indeed, since Christ is himself their peace, it would be unnatural for them to live otherwise than at peace with one another. If the bond of peace as spoken of here love is the perfect bond, there is no dissonance between the two. Love and peace alike are the fruit of the Spirit. The mind of the Spirit is life and peace.*” Let's speak the native language.
- Because . . .

What can be more beautiful than when God's people live in a united state?

- Bonnie read Psalm 133 from the New American which begins, *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!* Psalm 133:1 (NASB) Peterson paraphrases it with those words I used repeatedly as I began this talk, *How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!* Psalm 133:1 (The Message). The Psalmist is saying, “It doesn't get any better than this!” And then he uses a description that is foreign to us in 2021, but three thousand years ago it would have made a word picture of the indescribably good feeling of the experience of such fellowship, that it flows down over the people of God with the cleaning and soothing and sweet smelling blessing of unity and peace. The unity of the people of God is that wonderful!
- And then the Psalmist uses another illustration that would have been very clear to the inhabitants for the dry and dusty land of Israel, but not so much to those of us who live in northern Ohio which always has enough rain. He talks about the dew of Mount Herman. It is a refreshing word picture for a people who live in a dry and thirsty land. The region around Jerusalem was dry and rocky and barren. Mount Hermon is about 100 miles north of Jerusalem, and it rises out of the area north of the Sea of Galilee which is a beautiful and green region watered by the norther end of the Jordan River which is fed by snow melt from Mount Herman. It's the wildest thing to be in such desert and look up at the mountain which is on the border between modern Israel and modern Lebanon and see ski slopes. So the picture is of complete refreshment. When people get along, that is what refreshes humanity. And it is God's desire for us. What could be more beautiful than that?
- And so we need to . . .

Go all out and live it out

- The Psalmist in Psalm 133 is talking about nothing less than the fellowship is illustrated by the Greek word *koinonia*. Let me refresh your memory with a quick and accurate reference from Crosswalk. “*While there is no exact translation in English, koinonia is a Greek word most closely associated with concepts of a holy, covenantal fellowship. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines it as “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation.” Its origin is in the Greek word koinonos, which means partner, sharer, and companion. In short, it is a shared community that involves deep, close-knit participation among its people.*” Then they clarify it a bit further with this: “*While some are tempted to substitute the word “fellowship” for koinonia, it's far deeper. Fellowship is a more surface-level, friendly relationship, while koinonia is full, intimate unity.*” It's not just surface. The unity *koinonia* describes goes deep and all out.

- F. B Meyer points this out when he writes, “*We must not only be wanting God's purpose, but must be willing to dwell together, that is, to manifest our unity in outward action.*” That is all out, all in, and walking our talk. That is the picture of the Church in its united state.

Conclusion: The danger is that the kind of unity the Psalmist and Paul speak of can all too easily become more and more rare. May it not happen with us ABC! Yes, we have incredible unity amongst ourselves, and may it always be! But let’s resolve to stand in unity with the Church around the world. Stand up for your brothers and sisters in Christ across town and across the world. Let’s not get drawn into debates about earthly things that can divide when we can affirm *There is one body and one Spirit—just as we were called to the one hope that belongs to our call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* Ephesians 4:4-6. This is what matters eternally. Our political party, our skin color, income level, our neighborhood, etc. are all earthly things that can be used for division, but the blessing of God promising life forevermore is in the unity of the Spirit. We are one in the Spirit, we are ONE in the Lord! That is what we are called to Church! We are called to be in a united state. Amen.