

Written Copy: 1 Corinthians 1:10 “Called and Unified in Christ”

3rd Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, January 22nd 2023

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10

¹⁰ Brothers and sisters: I am personally imploring you through the work of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order that all of you may speak the same thing, and there may be no dissensions / divisions among you. However, having been perfectly fitted together you might be of the same mind and the same opinion.

Exegetical Statement (Matthew 4:18-22)

Jesus travelled from the Jordan where John was baptizing back to Galilee in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophetic words that the “Galilee of the Gentles” would have the great light of God’s salvation shine upon them. Because His hometown Nazareth refused to see Him in any other way than the “Carpenter’s son”, He made His base of operations in Capernaum, which is part of the trade route that connects people from the north and south of Palestine. There He began proclaiming that the reign and rule of God stands near to them in Him. He not only calls people to repent but gives them through His words the power to turn away from pleasing their sinful selfish hearts, and allow the Spirit to rule in them by faith. To assist in this ministry, He calls four fishermen to leave their present vocations and take up a new one, following Him in faith, love, and service. He does this through the Spirit working repentance and new obedience in their hearts and minds through His Word and presence. They were catching fish with their nets, but He will teach them to catch people by casting the net that is the Gospel. He is training them to become apostolic leaders in His Church, where they will no longer be mending nets, but learn how to knitting diverse people together into the One Body of Christ.

Focus Statement:

It is Christ working through the means of grace who calls us out of darkness into the marvelous light of faith in Him and the fellowship of His Church. Only He can make us worthy in the eyes of the Father by taking all unworthiness and giving us His right standing. His Spirit is the power at work in our hearts of repentance: moving our sinful selves off the throne of our hearts and putting Christ back where He belongs as our Lord and Savior. His Spirit not only unites us to Him but to one another through His work in the Sacrament where we all share of one loaf: His body and His blood, united at the rail as His One body, His Church.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

Even though by faith we are called in repentance out of the darkness of pleasing our sinful self, we slip back into it, especially when we have disagreements with one another. We pick sides and believe the Lord has as well, taking our side against them. We forget that the only one who was always in the right was Christ Himself. We are just as unworthy to be in His Church as those we make out to be our adversary.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Seek the unity we are given by faith through the means of grace. With repentant hearts see ourselves and one another as being equally sinners in need of grace, and equally loved and saved by the work of Christ for me and for all. Through our participation in the means of grace work with the Spirit to knit us together as His body, sharing the same mind and same opinion that comes from the love of Jesus.

Subject Sentence: Jesus call us and knits us into the unity of His Body

Introduction: The Breakup of the Beatles

As many of you know I am a great fan of the Beatles. Theirs is an amazing story: how they came together as four young musicians and jelled into a band that would change rock and roll music forever. All four were just the right combination of individuals whose musical talents jelled to make the whole thing click. And when they were at their best, they were working together, each as an important part of the whole. So what made the most successful band in the history of rock fall apart and break up at the height of their popularity? Divisions in what had once been a group mentality.

When they began, they lived and worked in each other's presence constantly. They were on the road touring all the time. The pressure to come up with new material meant that the songwriters: John Lennon and Paul McCartney, had to work on writing songs in hotel rooms, whenever they had a spare moment, often sitting each on a bed, staring at one another across two acoustic guitars, each playing a line of a song they were working on and the other rebounding off it for the next line. It was truly a collaborative effort in the strict sense of the word.

As they grew older, gained girlfriends and wives, and started families, they were not in each other's presence as much. John would write songs at his house, and Paul separately at his. But they would get together before going into the studio and work on what each other had come up with, adding and changing things for the better according to each other's input. And there were times when John would have a partially finished song that was lacking something, while Paul had a different song that he was trying to write that was incomplete. They would come together, mold them and knit them into one great song. Their hit "We Can Work It Out" is a great example of this. No matter who wrote the song, when they were gelling as a band, all four would work on adding their own input, especially adding to the composition according to their own instrumentation. They worked together to take what was rather bare sounding and fashion it into what we have today.

But in the end, they stopped allowing one another to have creative input. Paul wanted to tell the other three exactly how to play their instruments on his song. John didn't want to spend the time fashioning a great arrangement. George was sometimes not listened to at all, and as he began to develop as a songwriter in his own right, had to fight to get any of them recorded. In the end they treated one another as session men, brought in to play exactly what they were told with no chance to add anything creative. They were no longer functioning as a group but four individuals, all wanting their own way and growing increasingly intolerant with one another.

Finally, each went his separate way. Although each member would go on to record memorable hits of their own, none of them separately ever achieved the magic and success they had when they had worked together as that one band: The Beatles.

Called into Unity. Living is Disunity

I highly doubt that you or I will ever be a part of anything as commercially successful as the Beatles. But we have been called into something far greater and more lasting. We have been called into the Church; each of us personally called to be a part of this living breathing entity: the body of Christ on earth. And how it happened was a miraculous thing indeed.

We see an example of how it happens in our Gospel Lesson. Jesus came to Capernaum and went walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee for a purpose. He wasn't getting in His early morning exercise. He was there to find four fishermen whom He had met once already. He came to them and called out to them: Peter and Andrew, then James and John. He gave them the command "Come! Follow me." Simple yet powerful words. Words that turned them from trusting in themselves to trusting in Him as the long-awaited Messiah. Words that changed their lives and moved them to a new vocation. No longer would they cast nets into the sea in order to catch fish. They would learn how to cast the net of the Gospel into the unbelieving world which by the power of the Spirit would draw others into this amazing entity, His body on earth, the Church. And they were called to work together with a unity of purpose that was found in following Him.

Jesus didn't call perfect men; far from it. They were each broken and sinful men. James and John showed that when they wanted to call fire down from heaven upon a Samaritan village that refused them hospitality. Peter showed that repeatedly, and most infamously when he denied Jesus three times. All 12 did that collectively when they refused to hear and accept Jesus prophetic words that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer and die, and rise again. Instead, they began to argue about who among them was the greatest. And you and I are no different from them.

Jesus came to you and personally called you to faith. In your baptism He called you to come and follow Him in faith, to believe in Him and serve Him as a member of His Church. He called you to come here and be an active part of this congregation, this local gathering of His body at work here in this place to build up one another and go out sharing His gospel message. He has called each one of us to be a part of something much greater than what we could ever do on our own, something that is His means to change the world.

He called you and He called me. Yet just like the disciples we are far from perfect. We lose sight of the unity we are to have as the body of Christ when we make things "all about me" personally. In our own way we argue about who is greater than another, whose feelings are more important than another, who is right and who is wrong. As saints and sinners at the same time sometimes we say and do things that hurt the feelings of one another, or others do things that hurt our feelings. That's you and I being saints and sinners at the same time, each one of us having that old sinful self that rises to the occasion to lead us into sin.

That old sinful self exists in me as well as in you. And I know for a fact in me it never wants to admit it's wrong. It only wants to focus on what has been done to me, how I've been wronged. It works to justify how I feel, and wants to assure me that the hurt and the anger that I have toward someone else is justified given the circumstances. In sinful pride I focus on me at the expense of my brother or sister in Christ. This happens in me, as well as in you from time to time. We let divisions appear and fester that threaten to break the unity of the whole, that body of Christ we've been called into.

Means of Grace: Unifying Power

Jesus calls broken sinful people to be a part of His body on earth, His Church. And that powerful call to faith also has the power to unify sinners who want to make it "all about me". He calls out to us with the same message He preached throughout Galilee, the message that John the Baptist preached before Him, "Repent! For the kingdom of heaven-the reign and rule of God on earth-stands near." It stood near being present in Him and being offered in His Word. That message has the power to change us from broken sinful people who make things all about us to kingdom people, precious children of the Heavenly Father who begin to make things not about us, but about our Lord and Savior first and other brothers and sisters in Christ second.

Jesus does this working through the means of grace that work repentance in my heart and life and in yours. His Spirit works through the Word to show me the ways my life has taken a wrong turn. How I've made myself, my desires, and my feelings and justification of myself more important than how the Heavenly Father sees me and wants me to live. He shows me how I displease and disappoint the One who has given me all I have and hold, even my very life.

Then He shows me my Savior. The One who lived His life in perfectly obedient in every way according to the will and command of the Father. He shows me how Jesus did this not with reluctance, but as His expression of love for His Heavenly Father. He shows me how this love is far beyond anything I could conjure up in my heart on my own. It's the love that drove Jesus to take upon Himself all of my sins, my brokenness, my selfishness, my lack of love and compassion for my brothers and sisters in Christ and suffer and die to remove it all from my personal record forever. It's the love which move Jesus to suffer my punishment of eternal damnation on the cross, and in exchange give me what His obedient life earned for me, life with Him now and eternal life to come. And He gives this to me as His free gift of faith. He gave it to me in my baptism. And renews it through the means of grace: His Word and Sacrament.

Jesus did all this for me. And He has done all this for you too. He did it through that same unconditional supernatural love that He has for you. He suffered died and rose again to save you from eternal death because, just as with me, He couldn't stand the thought of you living apart from Him for eternity. He did all that was necessary to give you life with Him now and eternal life to come.

He did for you. And He did it for the person sitting next to you. He did it for the person sitting in front of you, and behind you, and across the aisle from you. He did it for that person who you believe has wronged you and who you struggle to forgive. He loves them every bit as much as He loves you, because they too are His brother and sister in faith, one of the Father's precious children.

Living in the Unity of Christ on the throne of My Heart

That faith and that love is the source of the unity we are to have as His Church. We have been called to faith and placed into His body the Church to live out that life of faith that the Holy Spirit describes through Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.** The Spirit calls us to live with one another united in the same mind and will, one that is not our own, but that conforms to the perfect will of the Heavenly Father who called us by the name of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to repent and follow Him, to change from living as if we were most important and instead make Him and our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ more important than us.

That's the unity He calls us to. And on our own it is impossible to achieve. But thankfully we do not live out our lives of faith on our own. His Spirit is at work through the means of grace to heal the divisions caused by our sinful hearts and repair the breach by the powerful work of His love on our hearts and minds. It's the work He began in your baptism and continues to do to this day. He was at work at the beginning of this service when you confessed your sins. You didn't go off and do it by yourself in private. You did it in the company of your brothers and sisters in Christ, confessing that you, like them have sinned against God and one another. Confessing that in reality you are no better than they, but like them deserve His temporal and eternal punishment. But then you hear that the Lord, on behalf of all Christ has done for you, forgives you, just as He does them.

You hear God's word preached, read, and sung just as they do. It is God speaking to you and to them, calling all of us to be united in our thinking, and our judgments, and our values. You like they fall short of this. You like they hear how Christ has removed your sins and erased your failures. And that with the same love He has shown you, you are to love and forgive even those who you believed have wronged you and hurt you, because the Father whom you have wronged and hurt forgives you abundantly.

And then you come and enjoy the Lord Supper, the meal that is itself a great expression of the unity we are called to live out by faith. It is here that as Luther said, "***We all partake of the One loaf***" that is the body and blood of the One true Savior, Jesus Christ, given for you personally for the forgiveness of all your sins. It is given not just to you, but to your brother and sister in Christ at the rail with you. Given even to the one with whom you have had differences with, the one whom you may be struggling to forgive. The same Jesus that comes to you, His real presence cloaked in the bread and wine, comes to them also to assure them that they stand forgiven in the presence of the Father Almighty, and in the presence of His Son, our Lord and Savior, ruling from the throne. His presence in them and in you is what gathers us together and makes us truly one, united in Christ.

Conclusion

The Beatles started out as four talented musicians united as a group to make music that changed the world. But as those who were very much a part of the world, they succumbed to the inherent selfish desires we all have to make it all about us at the expense of others. But you and I have been called into something far greater, the family of God, the Church, Christ's body on earth. We were called by the powerful working of the means of grace through which the Holy Spirit does the miraculous work of repentance. He turns us from living to please ourselves and instead live to please Him by loving one another as He has already forgiven us. It's not always easy. Sometimes it's a process that the Spirit has to continue to work on us and in us. But thank God He doesn't give up easily. And when we demonstrate that kind of love and forgiveness, we tangibly demonstrate the unity that makes His Church so special, as well as the Gospel that changed you and me, and can change those whose lives we touch, granting to them the gift we've been given of salvation, forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting. Amen.