

## Written Copy: Ephesians 4:2-7 Our True Unity in Christ

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 13

Sunday, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021

### Text: Ephesians 4:2-7

<sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit---just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call--- <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

### The text's intent

Encourage the Church that is made up of unique and differing individuals with differing looks and gifts to hold steadfast to the unity we have in faith toward Christ. To realize that we are united by the same baptism which brings into each of our hearts the same Spirit, who moves us to regard ourselves in humility tempered by gentle yet strength of faith in the truth we have been taught to bear with one another's sinful differences in patience and sacrificial love. We recognize that Christ creates the unity through His work of salvation, His Spirit is the source of the unity. We are to work with the Spirit through the means of grace to remain united with His Church. We see others who, although different from us, are like the differing parts of the same body who working together, corrected, empowered, and led by Christ, do the work of ministry: to build one another up in the faith and share that faith with the world.

### Focus Statement:

The unity we have is a gift of faith that comes from the one baptism that brings into my life the one Spirit, who created in my the one faith in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and the one peace it brings between me and the LORD and me and my fellow believers. Through the means of grace He works to keep me united with the Church that is His body and equips me to be a unique part that works in union with others to be the Body of Christ in mission. His love and forgiveness are the power for me to forgive and work alongside of those who are different from me

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

We mistake the unity of the Church for conformity with our own personal values and ideals that are not always Christ's. We relate with one another in relational love that cannot completely forgive those who annoy us. Instead of bearing up with those who are broken like us we shun them and seek to remove them or us from the congregation where Christ has called both of us to work and serve.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

With humbled and contrite hearts seek to bear with those who are called in Christ's body, with an eye to them being as important a member as we are. Seek to work together with them not for my own glory, or to create my own heaven on earth, but for the glory of His kingdom as I minister to my fellow believer and the lost building up one another if Christ-like love.

### Subject Sentence: Christ calls and unifies His Church to be His Body

## **Introduction: The Conformity We Seek Outside the Church**

What kinds of social groups existed when you were in High School, and which ones did you hang out with? When I was in high school there were the “jocks” who hung with other people who were on the football team, basketball team and swim team. There were the “brainiacs” who got the best grades, who would meet for study groups and do their homework together while everyone else was messing around. There were “the band people” who hung out together. And there were the “burn outs” who could usually be found in the smoking lounge outside of school. People generally found their group and stuck with them. General crossover between groups didn’t happen nor was it usually allowed. There is no way a “burn out” would be allowed to hang with the jocks. But I was one who didn’t conform to these groups. I was a member of the National Honor Society which put me in the middle of many “brainiacs”, and the only one with shoulder length hair. I was a member of band for a while, yet I knew and associated with some of those who were considered “burn outs” after school. The unifying factor for me was my involvement with the High School radio station which seemed to allow me to crossover into some of these other social groups. Perhaps the love or enjoyment of music enabled me to cross over those unwritten yet strictly observed rules and lines of demarcation between social groups.

Unfortunately my willingness to cross over these social lines faded after high school. When I got a job after High School working in the kitchen of a fancy restaurant at a golf course, I began to associate only with the kitchen crew. That was my social group. There was another social group: the Wait Staff. Many times we saw the wait staff as almost the enemy. They wanted to sit the whole restaurant at once and inundate the kitchen with orders, overwhelming us. In our minds the extra money they made from tips was actually based on the quality of the food we were cooking, yet they never shared anything with us. At the end of the evening we would see them adding up their tip money, which added to the angst I felt. I lacked the understanding that while I was paid a standard wage, their earnings came mainly from tips. Otherwise their weekly paycheck was pretty small. Sometimes we would meet them at the bar after work, but since we had to clean up the kitchen before we left they would always get there first, and start running up a tab. When they left very often they didn’t leave enough money to cover their portion of the bill. All of these things added fuel to the fire that caused the separation between us and them to grow.

In our social life today we naturally gather and associate with those whom we have common interests with. Often it is those who look like us, talk like us, have the same hobbies as us, the same dreams and goals, the same social strata, and the same political opinions. This is natural and not always a bad thing. The problem comes when we regard the Church as being like one of these social groups. Paul in our Epistle Lesson is pointing out how the Church differs from any other social construct in our life.

## **When We Treat the Church Like a Social Group**

Paul preaches that as members of Christ's Church we are to have unity with Him and with one another. Problems come when we mistake unity for uniformity or conformity. When we join a social group, we have uniformity with them so that our lives look similar. Many times to join or stay in that group we conform to their social norm. But that's not how the Church is built to operate. It's easy to overlook that in many Churches today, including this one, because there is a lot of uniformity or sameness in how we look and how we live. Most of us all have the same skin color, most have a German Lutheran Heritage, most are in similar socio-economic backgrounds, many of us are in the same age range. That means we have much in common. The result is that a lot of times we get along pretty well with each other.

But that uniformity only stretches so far. We all have differing tastes in things like music, books and movies, food, sports, in pastimes we enjoy, just to name a few. For the most part we overlook these differences. In fact these different tastes can be kind of refreshing, up to a point. But struggles come when that uniformity cracks. It does so because we are each unique individuals with differing gifts and talents, and differing opinions on things. When our differences break with the uniformity and conformity of those around us it causes angst and division within the Church. One example of this came when members were voicing their opinions about how to handle COVID-19 masking and social distancing. It was at the end of the last congregational meeting when I asked for input and opinion on the ending social distancing and mask wearing. A member of our congregation offered their opinion, which didn't conform to the thoughts and opinions of others who were present. This caused great offense to be taken by some. It seems we can sometimes tolerate mild differences in opinion, or personality, but when that person's opinion hits a hot button issue, we rise up in anger. When someone has a personality trait that can be annoying or aggravating to others, people seek any excuse to purge that person from our midst. I've seen this in action regarding differences over political parties or candidates. When we don't like who they support we seek not only to separate ourselves from them, but to go so far as to try to silence them. This may be how things work in our social groups outside of Church, but that's not how the body of Christ is supposed to operate.

## **Paul Describes What Unity In the Church Is Like**

The unity we have as members of Lamb of God, or as members of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, or even as members of the body of Christ is not based on human conformity or uniformity. We are called into the Body of Christ by Jesus Himself. We don't create this unity by looking or dressing the same, worshipping the same, having the same likes and dislikes, or even voting the same. The unity we have is the gift of Christ we receive by faith. Our unity as members of the Christian Church is found in our belief and confession of all three articles of the Apostle's Creed: who our Triune God is and what He has done and is doing for us. Our unity as members of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is based on our holding fast by faith to all articles confessed and taught in Luther's Small Catechism. Conformity of skin color, politics, personality traits, or even opinions on COVID-19 is never what our unity should be based on.

Paul explains what that unity is in **Ephesians 4:4-6** **<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit--- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call---<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.** Even though we attach ourselves to varying denominational identities there is truly only ONE Body of Christ on earth which is His Church. We are called into it by the ONE Spirit who is the power behind the Church's unifying force. We are united by the ONE faith we all share that He has planted in your heart and my heart, and in all believer's hearts through the ONE Holy Sacrament called Baptism. No matter whether that baptism happened in a Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church, Baptist Church, Methodist Church, or Catholic Church; if you were a baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, you were welcomed into the ONE Church of Christ by the ONE unifying Baptism. That Sacrament brought the faith into your heart and life that calls Jesus Christ your Savior and your Lord. He is your Savior no matter what color your skin is, what social strata you belong, no matter what political party you are affiliated with. He died and rose again to forgive you your sins, declaring you to be in right standing with the Father, and to bring you into unity within His Church on earth.

He transcends all manmade divisions and lines because His love transcends them. Those differences that bug us so greatly, that we allow to divide us have no place in the Body of Christ. Jesus loves you so much that He gave His life for you, and sent His Spirit to call you to faith just to make you a part of His Church. He does that even though we, as sinful human beings don't always conform to His will as stated in Scripture. As sinful human beings we all in some way shape or form stand opposed to His law, which is His proclamation of what is truth and how a member of His Church should live. We go along with those laws that conform to our hearts desire, but stand opposed, usually secretly, to those that do not. We overlook them and ignore them. God would have every right to banish us from His Church on earth and from His presence in eternal life, but He does not. Instead He points out these differences to us through the Spirit He has given us. He does this so, with hearts moved to ask forgiveness, we would turn away from this disobedience. He turns us back to Him in order to keep us united in the one true faith and keep us in the midst of His one true Church.

## **How We Should Regard Our Differing Members of His Church**

And how does He want us to treat our fellow members of His Church, those who He has called and chosen to be a part of it? How does He want us to regard them even when we disagree with them, or when they get on our nerves? As poor miserable sinners just like you and me, who don't deserve to be members of His Church, but are made worthy and made deserving by the same Spirit who has made us worthy through the same Baptism we have undergone. The same one that grants to us and to them the same faith we hold fast to. He wants you to regard them and care for them with the same love that He has for you, no matter how much you may disagree with them. We are to treat them as imperfect children of the Heavenly Father made perfect by Christ, just as we are.

Paul tells us how we are to conduct ourselves in regard to our relationship to our fellow members in the Body of Christ. **(Ephesians 4:2-3) <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** Humility: regarding their feelings, opinions, desires just as valid as ours, regarding their place before the Heavenly Father as equal to our own. With Gentleness: not meek and compliant in all things, especially those things that are not in line with our faith, that are not in keeping with Scripture. We should correct them as needed and be guided by Scripture in doing so. But we do this in love, Christlike love, that is full of understanding and patience. And those differences of opinion that are not in opposition to God's Word, and as well as those character traits that get under our skin, we bear with them through the love of Christ, remembering that as aggravating that they may be, we too may have personality quirks that annoy others, that cause others to bear with us in love.

We do all this not to create the bond of unity we share as the Church, Jesus creates that. The bond of peace was created by His death and resurrection which removes all offenses we have in the eyes of the Father. And when we have peace with the Father His Spirit works to create and maintain peace with our fellow man, even when they are not at peace with us. We do this so that we ourselves remain in unity with Jesus and His Church, so that we don't fall away. Thankfully it's not all up to us. It is the Spirit working through the means of grace that keeps us in unity with His Church.

I remember back when I was a Deacon at my home church. We had a family come and visit and worship with us. One of the responsibilities that the LORD had laid on my heart at that time was to greet visitors, especially after worship. When I came up to them at the end of service this couple unloaded on me with all that they saw that was wrong with our worship and our Pastor. I was not prepared for this and was taken aback. I told them I would grab Pastor and see if they would meet with him. They said they weren't interested and would not be back. But they would make sure the Michigan District Office knew along with the District President. Afterwards Pastor came to me, and having some inkling that I was troubled, and asked me what that couple had said. I told him. I did so feeling guilty that we as a church had somehow failed this family. My Pastor responded with something that has stuck with me: some people go from Church to Church, and from Congregation to Congregation, seeking the "perfect" one. In this life there are no "perfect" churches. There are only congregations filled with broken people, and Christ comes to put them back together in His image.

## **Conclusion**

As you can see, being the Church is easy. It doesn't come naturally. Our natural inclination is to draw near to those who are like us and abandon or chase away those who are not. Our natural inclination is at time to treat the Body of Christ as just another social club. You can choose which social clubs you belong to, but you can't, and you did not choose to be a member of the Body of Christ. Likewise you can't choose to live in unity with Christ and His chosen members. Instead He chose you, He made you worthy, and His Spirit is hard at work keeping you worthy and keeping you united with His One True Church. While you chose to become a member of Lamb of God, you were drawn here by the Spirit working in you. You didn't choose who your fellow brothers and sisters in faith would be, Jesus chose them. He wants you here to be an important part of His body through which His Spirit works to do the ministry of the Church, and does so working in unity with all those members of His Body that He has chosen. It doesn't matter if they have opinions or political beliefs that differ from ours. It doesn't matter if they have aggravating personality traits. Every member of Christ's body has sinful short comings, just as you do and I do. Welcome to ministry in the Church. Welcome to a unity that the world can't understand or comply with. Welcome to Jesus working through you despite your sinfulness. Welcome to Him doing the same for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Welcome to Him using all this to grow your faith and equip you to be His Church in the world. Welcome, as we look forward to that day when Christ will say to you, "Well done, my good and faithful servant! Welcome to the joys of eternal life. Amen