

“Unity In The Church”

Philippians 1: 1 – 11; Ephesians 4: 1 – 13; 1st Corinthians 12: 12 – 27; **John 17:20 – 26 (Sermon)**

The Bible uses an analogy of the human body to explain and promote unity in the church.

Unity in the church is so important that it is also stressed in 1st Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians.

Any and all churches can benefit from the lessons in 1st Corinthians 12 since jealousy and divisions can and will occur in any church that is not totally focused on Jesus Christ and if they are not totally focused on accomplishing their mission of advancing The Kingdom of God in their neighborhood.

The 17th chapter of the Gospel according to John records Jesus’ prayer just before Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In the first five verses Jesus prayed for Himself.

Then in verses 6-19 Jesus prayed for the 11 disciples.

Then last but certainly not least in verses 20-26 of John 17 Jesus prayed for all future believers.

That is us, folks.

The last thing a person tells you before they leave is what they want us to remember.

Jesus prayed for what Jesus wanted the most for us.

There are many things Jesus could have prayed for when He prayed for us but even a casual reading of our text from John reveals that Jesus wants unity among all of His disciples.

First I want to be perfectly clear unity is not uniformity.

God loves diversity. We all look different, we think differently, and we act differently.

God did not want or create cookie-cutter Christians.

But as Christians we are united in Christ, we are united in what we believe, and we are united in what our mission is. And we are called to be united in our behavior.

We are called to think like Jesus, talk like Jesus, and to act like Jesus.

Right before Jesus was arrested Jesus prayed for unity among believers.

You see we will never be able to accomplish our purpose as Christians unless we are united in who we are, united in what we believe, united in our behavior, and united in our mission.

Next we need to note that Jesus asked God to give us unity.

That means that unity in the church is a gift from God.

Unity can never be fabricated or achieved by an organizational structure or by a cleverly written mission statement.

Unity can never be achieved by our own efforts.

However, we must be willing to receive God's gift of unity.

Unity is much more than a feeling.

The unity that Christ prayed for was for all of us to be united in The Holy Spirit.

Christians are drawn to other Christians because they are drawn to Jesus Christ.

In verse 21 Jesus prayed that, ***"they would also be in us."***

Jesus prayed for us as believers because Jesus loves us and Jesus has a plan for each of us.

Jesus' plan was that all people would come to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him.

Jesus called us as Christians to represent Him to a lost hurting world.

We often take this responsibility that Jesus has given to all Christians lightly, but our text for today reminds us of the great responsibility that Jesus has given to each of us.

Notice verse 21. ***"I pray also for those who believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me"***.

Jesus knew that His church could never have the impact on the world that He desired unless the church was totally united in its purpose and in our behavior.

When we look at all four of our lessons for this morning we can begin to get a sense of the unity that Jesus wanted us to have in the church.

In verse 1 of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi we read, ***"To all the saints in Christ at Philippi."***

Did you ever think of yourself as a saint?

Well you are a saint if you are in Christ!

We do not become a saint by what we do, or by a decree of the church, but rather we become sanctified by our position in Jesus Christ.

Here we see that we are united in our position – ***"In Christ"***.

We are **all** brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are all different however; we are all one in Christ.

Our congregation is blessed to have different nationalities, different races, and different sexes.

We also have a wide variety of ages and different educational levels in our congregation.

But because we each have asked Jesus Christ to be our personal savior and we have made Jesus the Lord of our life we are united in Jesus Christ.

In our lesson from Ephesians we read that God has given each of us different gifts so that the ***“body of believers will be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.”***

We are to be united in what we believe.

Many Sundays we state what we believe using the Apostles’ Creed.

This is a statement of faith.

However it is not the only statement of faith, but rather The Apostles’ Creed is a statement that all true believers subscribe to.

As Christians we are to be united in our belief.

Next Jesus prayed for unity so that we would exhibit the glory of God.

The glory of God is the visible manifestation of all of God’s attributes.

Look at verse 22 of our lesson from John.

“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one”.

God’s gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit enables believers to exhibit the fruit of The Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

However, we must choose to exhibit these Godly characteristics in all of our words and in all of our actions.

We cannot control many of the situations we find ourselves in but we can always choose how we react to those situations.

Jesus prayed that we would be united in our commitment to exhibit His Devine characteristics in all of our actions each and every day.

Also note the Apostle Paul addressed his letter to the ***“servants of Jesus Christ”***.

As Christians we are all called to serve Christ.

God gives all people talents and abilities.

In addition as believers we all have been given spiritual gifts.

In our lesson from Ephesians we read that God has given each of us different gifts to “*prepare God’s people for service.*”

Then in verse 5 we read that we are united in our mission “*because of your partnership in the gospel.*”

Jesus prayed that we would be united in our commitment to build up the body of believers and that we all would be united in our commitment to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the people around us.

Jesus makes it crystal clear in verse 23 that He is praying for our unity so that we will be successful in accomplishing our purpose.

As Christians our primary purpose is to let the world around us know that God loves them and that Jesus came to earth to give spiritual life to everyone who believes in Him.

This is the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus prayed for us to be united so other people would come to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him, and to spend eternity with Almighty God.

We need to remember that Jesus prayed His prayer for all believers to be united just before Jesus was crucified.

This tells us that the unity of Jesus’ disciples was what Jesus desired most of all.

If unity was what Jesus desired the most for His disciples shouldn’t I do everything in my power to avoid complaining, arguing, gossip, to eliminate any cliques, and /or stop insisting on doing things my way?

If unity was what Jesus desired the most for His disciples shouldn’t I always strive to be a unifying person in my church family.

If unity was Jesus’ last prayer request before Jesus died shouldn’t unity in our church be a priority in your prayers each day?

We also need to remember that when we made our profession of faith in Jesus Christ we each promised to further the peace, purity, and the unity in the church.

So the question is; *what are you doing to further the unity of Mt Paran Presbyterian Church?*

When there is love and acceptance even unbelievers will want to be a part of a church family.

But when there is dissention and criticizing in a church people will not want to be a part of it.

Jesus prayed for unity because unity is essential for a church to grow and for a church to accomplish its God given mission.

You see as Christians we will never be able to accomplish our purpose unless we are united in who we are, united in what we believe, united in our behavior, and united in our mission.

Unity is what Jesus wanted the most for His Church. **AMEN**

Let Us respond to God's Word to us by prayerfully singing Hymn # 565 - *"To Be Like Jesus"* . We will remain seated as we sing Hymn # 565 *"To Be Like Jesus"* as a prayer.