

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of July 12, 2009

The Superglue of Heaven and Earth (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 1st chapter of Ephesians:

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him."

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, today we will talk about unity. There are many famous sayings about this topic..."United we stand, divided we fall"; "There is strength in numbers"; "All for one and one for all" as the Three Musketeers would say; and as our Lord Jesus said, "If a house is divided against itself that house cannot stand" (Mark 3:25). Unity is something that the world almost universally holds up as a grand ideal and something praiseworthy. We look for unity in marriage, in our families, in our friendships, and ideally in our country. We also look for unity in our church. Our Lord looks for unity among us as well. We see this in Scripture which again and again speaks of being one in Christ, of being of one mind as God's people and sharing in the bond of peace. As Psalm 133 says, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"

Unity is a beautiful thing. It's something everybody wants along with peace, tranquility, and good will. The problem is the world is not unified. There is conflict – man against nature, man against man, and man against himself.

We as a society are not in harmony with our environment. The air is polluted, the water is polluted, the ozone layer is thinning, the ice caps are melting, and animal species are dying as a result. Most scientists say this is essentially a man-made problem and they cite pollution from industry, cars, and planes, and so on as the main culprits. In our desire to make our society a more convenient and easier place to live, regrettably we have succeeded in damaging the environment in which we live. Basically, our polluted world comes from the pollution of sin in man, as the resources God has given us have been abused, overused, and misused. We want harmony with our environment but is it still possible?

We all want peace and unity and harmony in our relationships too don't we. But we have a problem there too. There was a study done once by the Carnegie Institute of Technology and it found that 90% of all people who fail in their life's vocation fail because they cannot get along with other people. Oftentimes what starts as a difference of opinion between two people turns into an argument and ends up being a struggle for control and power over the other person.

We as people are complicated. We get frustrated when we don't get our way with things and oftentimes we don't know what we want ourselves. And we take our frustrations out on people. We want unity in our relationships but too often we want this unity on our terms as we forget about the needs of the other person.

Too often we don't let go of something that has hurt us in the past and we carry around this bitter weight of unforgiveness that eats away at the soul.

Friends, all the disunity, all the broken relationships, all the fights and all the wars in the world ultimately come from the conflict that is within the soul. We have two sides, the good and the bad. For Christians we have the old sinful nature and we have the new spiritually born again nature. We have two minds; one sinful and the other holy. It's a conflict that brews in our souls. We can certainly identify with the words of St. Paul in Romans 7, "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me." It's a power struggle between these two minds within us and we have a choice which will control us. If we occupy ourselves with sinful thoughts, sin will dominate our lives. But if we occupy our thoughts with God's Word and holy things the Lord will rule our hearts.

Yes we are complicated creatures. As Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things; and desperately wicked. Who can understand it?"

Friends, there is a certain degree of unity in the world. That can't be denied. There is camaraderie among friends who share common interests. There is a bond between fire fighters, police officers, and soldiers for example. We tend to bond with people who are like minded. These commonalities help to bond with people.

But what unites us – is it a common language, a common culture, common interests...? Our church is clearly diverse and multi-ethnic. Many of us and Christians around the world come from different cultures with different languages and experiences. So what unites us? What brings us to church on Sunday? We share the peace after the prayers but what does it mean to us? The world wants unity but it doesn't know how to get it. Do we as the Church of Christ have an answer?

Brothers and sisters, we have the deepest bond there is. Our unity is sealed in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. He has reconciled us with God and brought us into His household. He has made us God's beloved children. We are one family in Christ. He transcends all differences in this world. We are one in Him. St. Paul wrote this in Galatians 3, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Being one in Him means we share in the same eternal life He gives and we share the same God of love. And His love binds us together. In Colossians 1 it says that in Christ all things hold together. He is like the superglue of heaven and earth. Everyone who has Him has life and everyone who does not have Him does not have life.

God had a plan to redeem His creation even before its fall into sin and He put this plan into action when He sent His own Son to pay for the world's sins. He came to mend the broken world. Not only has He unified us with the Father He unifies us together in Him. The night before His death Jesus prayed to the Father that His disciples would be one as they are

one. In short, He has called us to have the same spirit of love with each other as He has shown to us. We are members of the same body and Christ is our Head. The key to being strong and supporting each other is to be connected with the Head.

The West Coast Redwood trees, most of which are in California are among the very tallest trees in the world. They generally reach heights of about 200 or 275 feet. These trees are hundreds of years old and some of them were living at the time Christ walked on earth. They've been through winds, earthquakes, fires and storms and they still stand. Nothing seems to daunt them.

One of the truly amazing things about these immense trees is that they have a relatively shallow root system. And yet they rarely ever fall. They have stood this test of time because the roots of the Redwoods are intertwined together. So in effect, at the root level the trees literally hold each other up.

In the same way if you and I are going to reach our full potential, we too need the support of each other. Our roots need to be strong as we journey through this life. Our roots need to be strong in Christ, and they need to be strong in each other. When we are connected to Christ, when we stay in His Word and encourage each other with the Word even the wildest storms of life won't make us fall. The resurrection life we have in Christ sustains us. The Word of Jesus is the powerful tie that binds us together.

When explorers entered Peru, they found huge, impressive buildings that may have been standing for 2,000 years. These ancient Inca structures were built of rocks of different sizes and shapes. Some were 3-sided, some 4-sided, and some 7-sided. They were fitted together quite perfectly and they stood for many centuries, even through earthquakes.

God builds His church in much the same way. The Bible pictures the church of Jesus Christ as a building, and each believer is a block in that building. Jesus is the cornerstone and the foundation. Peter said that we, "as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). And Paul said that we are "being joined together" and "are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:21-22).

There is a wonderful saying by a person named Vesta Kelly who said, "Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look at what they can do when they stick together." Friends, we are fragile and vulnerable on our own but when we stick together through the bond of Christ, when we stay in His Word He can do wonderful things through us. He sustains us to eternal life and ultimately He gives us the power to bring life to the dead as we share the message of the Gospel. The power is in the Good News of Jesus. With Him the old lofty saying, "All for one and one for all" is real and true.

Yes, people from all backgrounds with different gifts and abilities and interests make up Christ's church and yet we have unity in a common purpose, in a common Saviour; we have unity in our Baptism into Him and in His Holy Supper given to us. And when we let the Lord do His Work as we hold His words close we become part of a strong enduring House. The pyramids, the Inca buildings, the CN Tower and all the manmade structures in this world will crumble but the Church is built to last. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.