

The Feast of Pentecost
23 May, Anno Domini 2021
St. John 14:23-31
Pastor Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when brethren dwell together in unity." Unity is a blessing from God. It's really far more than that. It's a reflection of God Himself - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - who are united perfectly in will, in work, and in word. Unity with God is really the highest good there is. Unity with God is to share in His kingdom and His blessing. It is to have life. It is to love what is good and right and true. And all who are united to this one true God by faith and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit are then, and only then, able to enjoy a true unity with one another that will survive all other differences and endure for all eternity.

When God first made Adam and Eve, there was perfect unity between the Creator and His creation. Consequently, everything operated smoothly and in perfect harmony. Adam and Eve, created in God's image, united with God in will and word, thus shared a perfect and beautiful unity with one another. There was only peace and a love of the Divine order, the Divine word, and the Divine will. There was perfect love for each other and a desire to honor and care for one another. Everyone was content with who they were, how they had been made, and the role they had been given in creation. There was no personal ambition, no hidden agenda. They existed to serve one another and receive the blessings and care of God together.

Could you imagine if every marriage, every friendship, every relationship was defined by such selfless unity? It sounds almost ridiculous. But, that's because we are now a world defined by separation and division. The deceiver came and sowed the first seeds of division in the garden, turning Adam and Eve against God by accusing God of lying. And they believed him. That was all it took. All unity was shattered. Adam and Eve no longer trusted God and so they no longer trusted each other. Man was now afraid of God because he was a naked condemned sinner who was separated from God as an enemy. He no longer knew God as his loving Creator. Now God was a rightfully angered judge. Now death and the dread of condemnation hung over him. Consequently, Adam and Eve turned on one another and tried desperately to throw all the blame for their sin on one another. Cain killed Abel. David robbed Uriah of his wife and his life. Judas betrayed Jesus. Nations threaten each other with war. Neighbors spew out vitriolic hatred against

one another. Even among Christ's children, grudges and frustration fester and petty differences over unimportant things turn us against one another so that we won't even talk to each other. Dear children of God, I pray that such division is not found among us here. It is the devil's work and playground and has no place among the saints. If you have something against one another, speak to your fellow saints and be reconciled to one another. If you are harboring anger or bitterness, repent and do all in your power to bring about peace before approaching the most sacred act of unity - the Supper of Christ's Holy Body and Blood by which He is united to us and we to Him and to one another. Otherwise this Holy Communion speaks a word of judgment against you if you refuse to forgive as your heavenly Father in Christ has forgiven you.

Now, you might find unity over things that don't really matter. You can find people who share your taste in music, your love of the outdoors, or even your political views. But that's not really unity. Once matters of consequence come up, division quickly creeps back in. Opinions and goals begin to differ. One person wants to do things one way, another person thinks that would be foolish. Feelings are hurt. Unity is shattered.

The ancient serpent gladly slithers his way between husband and wife, children and parents, brothers and sisters, fellow employees, and best friends. There is no relationship off limits. If he can destroy unity, if he can raise up jealousy and anger and bitterness, you can be sure the devil will. Disunity, disorder, chaos, and division are the devil's trademarks and he will stop at nothing to accomplish his work. He is so good that he has even figured out how to dupe people into calling their disunity, unity. There are even churches, and I use the term loosely, who thrive on this nonsense. "We will be unified in our disunity. We will rejoice that because we believe everything we believe absolutely nothing. We will build ourselves towers, buy air time on cable TV, share ourselves all over Facebook so that we can make a name for ourselves as tolerant, loving people who have as the basis for our beliefs - nothing other than our own imaginations and self-delusions."

That isn't unity. That's just pretending and ignoring the division. It can't and it won't last because at the heart of this kind of so-called unity is selfishness and a hatred of the truth. Eventually those two things will cause division. It's what they do.

There can, however, be unity among people. But it must be a unity of truth. Consider those of us gathered here today. There are countless ways in which we're different and plenty of things we probably disagree on. But, underneath that, lies

unity, true unity built on the confession of two very simple truths. First, we are all equally and completely sinners. We all stand guilty under the Divine judgment. It doesn't matter if we are only a few months old or in our eighties, if we are a boy or a girl, if we are blue collar or white collar, single or married. All of us, by our very nature as descendants of Adam and Eve, are sinful and unclean. To say otherwise is only to lie to ourselves and to call God Himself a liar. If we aren't ashamed when we think back on how we have treated our neighbors, near or far, then we need to think a little harder. If we aren't terrified by how we have spurned God and His Word and the blessed Sacraments, then we need to be afraid. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That levels the playing field. It doesn't matter how long you've gone to church, how much money you have, how messed up your life is, or how put together your life appears to be - we are all equally poor, miserable sinners who deserve nothing from God but judgment.

But there is something else, something wonderful that unifies us, something that actually binds us together as one body - Jesus. Even though we may all look and walk and talk and think very differently and even though our sins, our failures, and our weaknesses may be very different - all of us and all of our sins have been equally forgiven by the One Man, Jesus Christ. He didn't spill different blood in different ways at different times for different people. He died, once for all. He rose, once for all. And He pours out His mercy and grace in the same way to every one of us. We all share in the one Baptism that we just confessed is for the remission of sins. In that Baptism we all received the same Holy Spirit who by His grace, has caused us all to believe and trust in this one Jesus. It is this same Holy Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost. He caused the apostles to preach with one voice, though in different tongues, the mighty works of God - that God has not condemned sinners but saved them, given His only Son, Jesus, into death so that we might live and be united again forever to our Maker and Redeemer. In the one body of the one Christ, there are to be no personal ambitions, no style preferences, no dictations by the way "I want things done". There is only Christ and His Word shared by all. All of our thoughts and opinions are to be brought captive to Christ and His Word. What He speaks we receive as divine truth - not something to be debated. Any disagreement we have with Holy Scripture is error on our part of which we need to repent and ask for aid from the Holy Spirit to help us receive in humble faith. What great joy to be forever united to all who confess the one true faith once delivered to the saints - bound together in Christ with patriarchs and prophets, apostles and evangelists, martyrs, family and friends, people of every tribe, nation, and language, those who remain on earth and those who have departed in faith and been gathered to Abraham's bosom!

Whatever differences we have with one another over those things not commanded in Scripture, we then allow each other in Christian freedom. Thus we rejoice in the unity that we share around this one Jesus and the Word that He has caused to be proclaimed again this day in our midst through the reading of the inerrant and infallible Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation. Here we are, people with an incredible array of opinions on everything from the best breakfast cereal to the best political philosophy, and yet we can raise our voices together as one in the hymns and the words of the Divine Liturgy as we speak back to our Lord the words He first spoke to us. And there is truly no greater unity that we could possibly enjoy than that of the Lord's Supper as we eat and drink the one body and the one blood of the one Jesus Christ. Here our Savior unites Himself with us so closely that He actually enters into our mouths, into our bodies so that He can give us life, His life. No longer dead in our trespasses we are united to the living Christ. We are now bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh. And united to Him we are united to one another. This why this meal is also called the Holy Communion - here we declare to each other and to the world the communion, the unity, that we share with God and with one another as fellow forgiven sinners who have been redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb and set free from sin and death. This is why our Lord passed around the one loaf and the one cup for His disciples to share. This is what St. Paul was talking about when, by divine inspiration, he wrote "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Cor. 10:16-17) We are one, as the Holy Trinity is one. And as one we share in our joys and in our sorrows, in our strengths and in our weaknesses, in our blessings and in our needs. Bound by the Spirit of Truth, who constantly proclaims to us the mighty acts of God in Christ Jesus, we are one.

The devil hates that. And he will stop at nothing to divide us. He will seek to turn us against one another, to drive a wedge between brothers and sisters in Christ over money, politics, and preferences. But he stands no chance as long as we remain fixed upon the Word of God. If we judge things as men and the world judge things, we can be certain that the foe will divide and consume us. But if we keep our eyes fixed upon that which has drawn us together and which binds us not only on earth but for all of eternity we will remain united in Christ forever. We will remain inseparably bound by the Blood of Jesus and by the Spirit who brings us the peace of Jesus every day. And wherever we may be, when we gather around the altar of God, there we will be united in song, in prayer, and in meal just as we will be united for all of eternity around the marriage feast of the Lamb.

May God continue to pour out His Holy Spirit that we may remain united in the One, true, Christian, and apostolic faith now and forever.

In the Name of +Jesus.