

June 8 & 9, 2024

The Jesus Way | Unity

Philippians 2:1-13 & 1 Corinthians 1:10-15

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About 7 years ago I found myself waking up late at night with what I was sure was a heart attack. I had never felt pain like that. So... after the really smart decision to wait a couple hours to see if the pain would go away (don't ever do that!), I drove to the emergency room. They promptly got to a room and started to do an ultrasound, but they were looking in the wrong spot. I keep telling them it was my heart, but they keep looking around my abdomen. I think I even said to the doctors, "Now, I'm no doctor but I think you might be looking in the wrong place." A couple of pain killers later, I'm laying down with a severe case of gall stones that they were worried would turn into pancreatitis. So, over the next several days doctor after doctor came to visit. One told me I needed surgery. Then a couple gastro docs wandered in and let me know that surgery wasn't always necessary. Nutritionists and dietitians came calling with handouts and advice about lowering my fat intake. I was like... "You can tell huh. Is it really that bad?"

So, you might understand all my confusion with all the different expert advice but there was one unifying theme. You are going to have to get up out of bed and get mobile before you can go home. So... highly motivated I get up out of bed and make it to the hallway and start walking. I'm thinking I'm going at a pretty good pace, feeling really good about myself. Then out the corner of my eye I see fast moving object coming up alongside and then pass me. I looked over to see who it was – must be nurse or doc – I mean who can walk that fast. Well... it was a little old lady, must have been 150 years old, zooming by with... an IV drip! Looking back on it now... after she lapped me for the third time... I'm positive that she gave me a look. Have you ever seen the look, you know the one that looks like pity and disappointment all at the same time. Yeah, that look. I'm sure it was that look.

Over the next day it became clear that a discharge was on the way. And the pressure was on... what

was the next step. What I wanted was for some unity of thought and advice about next steps. All I wanted was one unified word.

Unity. Words like unity, united, once carried great weight in my consciousness. Unity in our day to day. Unity in our communities. Our idea of unity has seemed to get smaller and smaller. The Apostle Paul felt this acutely. As we talked about a bit last week, the Apostle Paul was part of a group of folks who were planting churches dedicated to this new and strange religion that we now know as Christianity. This was a very difficult thing to do. Any potential new church member was either a very religious Jewish person who would need to be converted from the very deeply planted idea that salvation came through the ability to adhere to the religious laws and convert to believing in Jesus and faith in the Resurrected Jesus was salvation, not adherence to the law.

Then the next group of folks would be non-specific Gentile people who needed to convert from religious beliefs that there were many, many gods and to convert to believing only in Jesus. Then, put them together as a church – to form a unified church in Philippi with two very different groups/cultural/traditions/religious.

This church was in Macedonia and was formed by a group of women who met by a river on the Sabbath for prayer because there was no synagogue. This later became a house church in the home of a woman merchant named Lydia, who would host Paul and his missionary companions. One of the issues that was threatening to tear apart the church in Philippi, and why Paul writes to them about staying strong and stand fast, was the issue of allegiance. By the time the letter was written, Philippi loyal to Roman and fully dedicated to the emperor in Rome.

And at the time the letter was written the emperor in Rome had assumed several titles. Lord and savior – in this case Emperor Nero would have been called lord and savior. Every public event would have featured some pronouncement about Nero being lord and savior – kind of like our national anthem is used today. So, you have a

group of people who converted to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and everyone else around them are claiming that Nero is lord and savior. Makes for a difficult existence – especially as those devoted to Nero, find out about those who are devoted to Jesus Christ. Can you imagine the pressure?

Not only are they feeling pressure from outside they begin to feel pressure from the inside. There are those with selfish ambition – pushing buttons and having secret conversations. Personal agendas are beginning to creep into the mix. Some felt that they should go back to being Jewish as Judaism was a recognized religion in the empire while this new Jesus Christ religion wasn't and was in direct confrontation with the empire. Where would that leave the gentiles in the church? Where would that leave the church? Paul appeals for unity, and he does it in an amazing way and as we remember his teaching last week, it's a common theme in his letter to them.

Paul makes his appeal – In Christ

Philippians 2:1-8

¹ If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.

It's a common theme that not only repeats itself in Philippians but in Paul's other letters. We talked last week about having the same "mind" as Christ – leading us to humility, service, sacrifice, and gentleness. This week the Apostle Paul uses the phrase "in Christ."

Romans 8

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

In Christ... are differences are celebrated.

In Christ... we are one.

In Christ... we can be unified.

To be "in Christ" means to daily remember who you are. It's a daily call for us to trust the story of God's mercy and love. To trust the story that we are living, breathing redeemed and reconciled people. To be in Christ is to seek each day to trust the story that God finished creating and called us good. To trust the story then opens us up to the possibility of finding unity with one other because God created them and called them good too. We begin to see how we are all alike, what we all hold in common.

But outside of Christ we do not trust the story and all we can see are all our differences divide us. Outside of Christ we do not trust the story and split apart. Outside of Christ we do not trust the story and we use all kinds of reasons to tribe up. The Apostle Paul saw this happening in another church. The church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 1:10-15

¹⁰ Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹² What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name.

You and I live in a world not so different than Philippi or Corinth or any of the people and churches we will learn from through this summer worship series. We live in a world we find ourselves outside of Christ where we do not trust the story and we begin to send our allegiance to others who claim to be lord and savior. We live in a world where our allegiance to Jesus Christ is challenged from the culture and from within ourselves.

So, in this very difficult world we live in, how do we remain in Christ? How do we remind ourselves to trust the story of God's redemptive, reconciling move to us and for us? First of all, when we trust the story, we are reminded that we are different. Simply trusting the story makes us different. We don't to be like the world – tossed to and fro – Paul puts it like this another church, this time in Ephesus... Remember that you are in Christ.

Ephesians 4:14-16

¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

You are in Christ – that's our lens. That is how we see and interact with the world. We are in Christ, sowing unity, wherever we live, learn, work and play. We are unifiers that are in Christ on mission. The next time you encounter disunity in your friends, coworkers, family – whisper to yourself "I am in Christ" and then with confidence step into who you are.