

## Unity Intro sermon 9/8/2019

Yesterday it was my privilege to perform a wedding at the Calhoun Beach Club for a very nice young couple, Nick and Grace. Right after they audibly spoke their vows to each other they went one step further by visibly demonstrating their love and commitment to each other by placing a ring on each other's finger and repeating an additional verbal commitment.

A key foundational passage of Scripture often used in weddings is taken from Genesis 2:19-25

**Genesis 2:19-24 (NIV)** *Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.*

*But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

*The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."*

*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is **united** to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

This is the first time that the concept of "unity" is presented in the Scripture. There's a union between a husband and a wife that was not possible between Adam and all the other living creatures that he named.

**But unity doesn't necessarily mean uniformity.**

Yesterday when Nick and Grace exchanged rings they were committed to each other in love. They lived out this passage in Genesis in real time. But that doesn't mean that they came into total agreement with each other. Nick is still Nick and Grace is still Grace with each of their unique personalities and likes and dislikes and ways of doing things that may drive each other a bit crazy at times. If it means that we have to agree totally with each other on everything in order to have unity – then unity would never happen.

But we can still be united with someone else, whether in marriage or a deep friendship, and still agree to disagree on certain things.

Psalms 133 is entitled a psalm of assent. This is a part of 15 psalms 120-134, that Israelites would chant as they walked up to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the three annual festivals they were required to observe. So, picture this, you'd join in with people from all different lands, people you'd never met before, and together you'd focus your attention on God. So, while you might be of different economic and social backgrounds. While there would be people from all different walks of life. Your common denominator was that you were all going to Jerusalem to worship God. Your focus was on God, which then creates a unity between very diverse people. And notice what they would be chanting.

**Psalms 133 (NIV)**

*How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in **unity!***

*2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.*

*3 It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.*

*For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.*

People experience goodness and pleasantness when they are living in unity. But remember, unity wasn't the goal as they chanted this psalm together. The goal and their focus was on God and then unity was a by product of their shared and common focus.

Then David goes on to give us two illustrations of this unity.

1. It's like the effect of Aaron, the high priest, going through his dedication ritual before serving as priest in the temple. They would anoint his head and body with oil. Here it's described as an abundance of oil is poured over his head and it runs down over his entire body. He's completely covered in this precious oil. He's completely dedicated to God from the top of his head all the way down to his feet. And that's the effect of the unity among believers that David is referring to. People are so focused on God that their differences don't matter any longer, because they are all being covered by the presence and anointing of God and this covering unites them together in a singular focus. The distractions of the world fade away in light of this unified focus on God. It's like coming here to church and together focusing solely on God. We're unified in our worship and praise and we become one body focusing on God.
2. Secondly, David says it's the like when the evening dew of Mt. Hermon spreads out over nearby Mount Zion and it waters the vegetation and things around this unified group and blessed as a result. Have you ever gone camping and when you wake up in the morning, the outside of your tent is soaking wet, even though it never rained during the night. It's this dew that lands on everything and waters it. That's what unity in the Lord is like. God loves when His people are united by focusing on Him, and when they do this, His blessing flows out upon His people in very obvious ways. And others notice it the difference unity among believers make.

Unity continued to be very much a priority to Jesus.

Look at his prayer in the Upper Room. After some important teaching time, through actions and words, Jesus turns his attention to prayer and interceding for the disciples and then for us. As we jump into this prayer, Jesus has just prayed for his disciples there in the room with him. Next he focuses on all believers of all time, you and me are included in this section of his prayer.

**John 17:20-23 (NIV)** *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 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. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be **one** as we are **one**— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete **unity**. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

### **Observations:**

1. **Unity clearly matters to Jesus**
2. **Our model for unity is Jesus and His Father's relationship**
3. **Our unity comes from being united with Jesus**
4. **Jesus equips us for unity by giving us the Father's glory**
5. **A byproduct of unity is our witness to the world**

We are a very divided nation today as we sit here. NBC poll conducted last October revealed that 8 out of 10 people say they believe our country is "**mainly**" or "**totally**" divided.

- We're currently deeply divided between **political parties** (there's no sense of working together for a common good. It's more finger pointing and the blame game).
- We're also deeply divided over **immigration**,
- We're divided over how to handle to ongoing **deadly violence** in our country (gun control or mental health issues)
- We're divided over **health care**,
- We're divided over **racial lines** (Black Lives Matter campaign),
- We're divided over trust or mistrust in our **police forces**
- We're divided over **environmental issues**

- The list can go on and on and I'm afraid it's only get worse as we enter into an election year. We're going to be bombarded with ads attacking the various candidates.

And sadly, we're not much better as followers of Jesus Christ.

It's estimated that there are currently over **30,000 different Christian groups worldwide**. I think it's safe to say that the unity Jesus prayed for is not happening.

From **October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his "95 theses"** on the door of the **Wittenberg Castle** as a way to discuss some of the problems he saw with the Catholic Church's doctrine and practice, until now – Christianity has continued to divide rather than unite.

And that's why I enjoy the **Christian Church, Church of Christ** history and story. Because it was intentionally designed to be a unifying movement. When **Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone** and others followed God's leading, it led them to unite around core beliefs and allow our differences to not divide us.

Right here within our midst, how many different Christian groups do we have represented.

**Tell me what Christian denomination you came from.**

See that's the beauty of what the Christian Churches represent. We can agree to ignite over core beliefs and practices and agree to disagree over all sorts of other things.

I know for a fact that we have differences of belief and practice regarding:

- **Once saved always saved or believe you can lose your salvation**
- **Speaking in tongues or not**
- **End times:** some of you are **premillennial** others are **postmillennial** and still others are **amillennial**.
- We disagree over the **type of music** we should sing during worship: hymns or praise songs
- We disagree over what side of the **political spectrum** we should vote: democrats or republicans
- We all have **different spiritual gifts and natural abilities**. And together we can accomplish far more than if only a handful used their gifts.
- Some of you **smoke** and others think that's wrong.
- Some of you **drink** and others don't because of your beliefs
- Some of you like **cats** and then there's me
- Some of you will **root for the Vikings** this afternoon and others will root for the Bears or others
- Some of you believe we ought to only **read out of the NIV**, others **NAS**, and others **King James**
- We have various income levels represented here and yet that doesn't matter.

Isn't it amazing when we can come together and worship and praise God together, with all of those many differences and still be part of the same church family?

That's why for the month of September we're going to look at the basis for the Christian Church. Next week we'll look at our historical roots and after that we'll look at some of our core beliefs and practices that we unite around. Hopefully it will give us a far deeper understanding and appreciation for our unity in Jesus Christ despite our differences.

I believe that we're stronger together. Our unity doesn't come from trying to be united. It comes when we focus our minds and hearts on Jesus Christ. And as long as we're focused on Him and His greatness and majesty then our differences can make us stronger not weaker.

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9/8/2019**

\_\_\_\_\_ doesn't necessarily mean \_\_\_\_\_.

Psalms 133 is a part of the psalms of \_\_\_\_\_

How did the Israelites achieve unity?

In John 17 Jesus prays for unity for his disciples.

**Observations:**

1. Unity clearly \_\_\_\_\_ to Jesus
2. Our model for unity is \_\_\_\_\_
3. Our unity comes from being united with \_\_\_\_\_
4. Jesus equips us for unity by giving us \_\_\_\_\_
5. A byproduct of unity is our \_\_\_\_\_

In what ways are we divided as a country?

Is Christ's church united? Why or why not?

What type of differences do we have at Knollwood Christian Church?

What sorts of things typically divide churches?

Have you ever experienced a division within a church?  
What caused it?

How do we achieve unity within a church?

What difference does unity make?

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