

Pentecost 10
August 2, 2015

"In the Body of Christ We Help One Another"

EPHESIANS 4:1-6, 11-16

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Gene Stallings was the football coach for the Alabama Crimson Tide. His 1992 team went undefeated and won the national championship. Someone once asked him to recall his greatest moment in sports. He talked about attending a Special Olympics track meet with his son John who was born with Down's Syndrome. The runners lined up, the gun went off and they raced to the finished line. About half way down the track one of the boys stumbled and fell. One by one, the runners stopped running, turned around and reached out to help the fallen runner get up and run again. Together as a team they went across the finish line.

When you come to worship, you are reminded every week that you are part of a team, a worldwide team of people who are the Body of Christ with Christ Jesus as your head. When you see one of your fellow members of the Body of Christ stumble and fall, you don't just ignore them and say, "I have my race to run. I don't have time for you." No, because Christ has shown so much undeserved love for us, we stop and take the time to help. You see, in the Body of Christ we help each other.

Jesus gives us opportunities

Because you are part of the Body of Christ, our Lord and Savior will give you opportunities to help one another. Paul writes, "As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received, Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Even though Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he had something in common with the Christians living in Ephesus. Together they knew this amazing grace of

God that called them out of darkness and brought them to know how they were rescued through Jesus. I share something special with you this morning. Together we have come to know how lost we are without Jesus. We have come to know how our God has done everything necessary to rescue us and save us. We are now totally committed to helping one another stay in God's grace and continue to be one with God through Jesus.

It is easy to get so wrapped up in what is happening in my life that I lose touch with how important it is to be involved in the lives of others to help them remain one in Christ. Paul urges us to live a life worthy of our calling by being humble and gentle and patient. He calls on us to bear with each other in love. Let's be real honest and transparent this morning. Other Christians will try your patience. They will get on your nerves. They will worry you and concern you as you see them opening their lives up to sin, not reading the Word and praying as they should, and even getting off track on the true teaching of God's Word. If you are bothered by other believers who have moments when they are irregular, then think about yourself and your moments when you have not been the best for your Lord. We desperately need our fellow believers to encourage us and help us as we travel this amazing journey to the place Jesus has prepared for us.

I struggle and so do you, to not let the things of this life occupy so much space in our heads that we have little time in our all so important agendas to think of the needs of others. If I take this cup and fill it with stones, it will not hold much water. When I think of all the things that can take priority in my life, there is little time left to think about helping other Christians keep their unity or oneness in Christ. Our Savior has chosen us to help other people come to know about him and become members of his body. He has also chosen us to help each other remain members of that body and not lose what we have.

Being part of the body of Christ is truly something special. Paul reminds us of this when he says, "There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all through all and in all." Jesus is the Head and we are his body. The Greek word used here for body is used in the New Testament to describe our bodies that are corrupted by sin. It is used to describe the body of Christ that lived the perfect life for us and suffered to pay for our sin. It is also used to describe who we are as Christians through Christ. Jesus is the Head and we are his Body the Church. Think of how closely connected your head is to your body. That is how closely connected to Jesus and all the blessings you have in him.

There is so much that we share in common with each other and with other members of the Body of Christ throughout the world. We have the same Holy Spirit who is working around the clock to keep us close to Christ. We have the same faith. We have the same hope of heaven. We have the same blessings of Holy Baptism. We have the same God whom we call our heavenly Father.

The other day I was conducting a Bible study at the Santa Maria Care Center. There were about a dozen ladies there who were in need of skilled nursing care because of their weakened bodies and minds. At the end of the lesson and hymn singing we joined together in the Lord's Prayer. As we prayed together it struck me how these people that I barely know are fellow members of the Body of Christ through Jesus. We have this common bond that we share of calling upon our God as our heavenly Father who is "over all and through all and in all."

One Roman historian noted about Christians that they called each other brothers and sisters. We want our brothers and sisters in Christ to stay together in the Body of Christ. The Lord will certainly give us multiple opportunities to serve each other and help each other when, especially when we stumble and become weak. Jesus will also equip us for the task.

Jesus equips us for this important work

It was the church father Augustine who said, "Lord ask what you want and then give what you ask." Listen to how Paul reminds us that Jesus is equipping us to help each other stay close to him in his beloved Body the Church. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness in Christ."

Paul had the privilege of seeing the church in Ephesus blessed with leaders who could help other members of the body of Christ grow and mature in their faith. In Acts 20 we read when Paul said goodbye to the congregation he had confidence that the leadership would continue to help the congregation grow and mature. He told the elders, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood," It is Jesus who raises up leaders in congregations who are able to equip and teach others to deepen their unity and closeness in the Body of Christ. It is Jesus who provided us with Apostles and Prophets who recorded God's Word of us on the pages of the Bible. It is Jesus who brings pastors and teachers into churches.

As I read these words I think of all the people my risen Lord and Savior has brought into my life to deepen my faith and bring me closer to Jesus. I am thankful for parents who took to me to worship and led me deeper in the Word. I am thankful for pastors who brought God's Word to me, and teachers in the schools I attended, and for those who have written books and posted pages on the internet to take me deeper in the Word. Each of us here this morning can tell a story of those who Jesus has given us to increase our understanding of the Word. This has all been carefully planned out for us so that we might become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Jesus does not want you to remain a baby in your faith. Paul writes, "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." When Paul said goodbye to the Christians in Ephesus, he was concerned about the false teachers who would come in after him and lead people astray. Listen to his scary words in Acts 20, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from our own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." So we grow in our faith so that we may discern false teaching when it comes to us from other Christians who are drifting away from the Word, false teachers on the Internet, and false teachers on the radio or television. Colossians 3 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts towards God."

As Jesus strengthens your faith and understanding of God's Word he equips you to help others grow in their faith. "Instead speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together, by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." We speak the truth to others in love. In our church we have a youth confirmation program that deepens our young people in the Word so they in turn can help us know the truth of God's Word. We study the Bible together in groups so we can hear each other bring out the truths of God's Word more clearly. So we grow together. Just as they muscles in your arms and legs grow as they are stretched and used, so the body of Christ grows as we speak the truth in love and strengthen each other.

Gene Stallings said his greatest moment in sports was seeing runners in the Special Olympics helping each other finish the race. The greatest moments we have together in this congregation are those times when we strengthen each other in the body of Christ. Look for these moments. Anticipate them. Trust that Jesus will equip you to speak the truth in love. Amen.