

## True Unity

Text: Ephesians 4:1-6

Hymn: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" (*LSB* 700)

"Can't we all just get along?" How many times do we think, say, and maybe even pray that? "Can't we all just get along?" Divisions are everywhere. We have divisions in our politics. We have divisions in our sports. We have divisions as to where we shop and where we eat and drink. And these divisions seem to be getting deeper and wider.

But how can we get along when we can't even sit down and talk? And when I say that, I don't have in mind the current—Lord willing, only temporary—unpleasantness of masks, physical distancing, and limitations on group gatherings. I'm thinking of the barriers that, long before COVID came along, we chose to let rule our lives: So many of our homes today have become no more than a set of cubicles in which the family members stash their stuff, listens to their own music, and watch their own programs, emerging only briefly into a common area to consume dinner while scrolling up and down endlessly on the smart phones that keep us stupid. Heaven forbid we put our devices down and actually have a conversation!

God's Word for today, Ephesians 4:1-6, teaches us how to get along. It teaches us about true unity. And this true unity is born from humility. Humility and unity, unity and humility, two sides of the same coin. What does God's Word teach us about how to get along?

"I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." Walk the walk, the Apostle Paul says. Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. To what calling have you

been called? That of God's child. You've been adopted into the family of God, called out of darkness into His marvelous light. This is your primary calling.

As we have been called by God into His family, God says, "Now live in this new identity that you have been given." What does this new identity look like? "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Right there in the middle of this description of the Christian walk is the word "love." In other words, there is no unity without love. And there is no love without humility. We have been given an example, more than an example, the gift of love and humility all wrapped into one person, namely, Jesus Christ. "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). "God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rm 5:8). "See what kind of the love the Father has given to us, that we are called the children of God, and so we are" (1 John 3:1)

The humility of Jesus, the Son of God, leaving His throne, taking on flesh and blood, living under the law, paying our penalty for having rebelled against God, bleeding and dying as our substitute, overcoming sin, death, and the grave—this is love. This is God's love for us. This is God's love for the world! This is the love that God has poured out on us in the waters of Holy Baptism. And this love has claimed you, adopted you, made you his own, bringing you into His family. This is the calling, the calling of God's love by which He has made you a new creature.

As God has made you new, He says, "Walk in this new life. Walk in this love." How does God want us to walk? With all *humility* and *gentleness*, with *patience*,

*bearing with one another in love*, eager to maintain the *unity* of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

To be *humble* is to think of others more highly than yourself. To be *gentle* doesn't mean to be a wimp. It means not flying off the handle and getting angry at the drop of a hat. To be *patient* means instead of taking what you want when you want it stepping back for the sake of others. To *bear with one another in love* is to show the same kind of mercy to each other that God has shown to each one of us.

This is the Christian life. And we live it out in the various vocations God has placed us in. Are you a husband? Be gentle with your wife. Be patient with her shortcomings. Love her sacrificially as Christ has loved you.<sup>1</sup> Are you a wife? Submit to your husband out of reverence for Christ. Be merciful to him with his shortcomings. Forgive him as Christ in love has forgiven you.<sup>2</sup> Are you a father or mother? Don't exasperate your children but bring them up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, modeling forgiveness in the home.<sup>3</sup> Be a good steward of the gifts God has given you, especially the gift of God's Word.

Brothers and sisters, neighbors in the neighborhood, family members, church members, cut each other some slack. If you have a problem with someone, talk to them about it. Love, encourage, be gentle, be merciful, and forgive. Forgive without conditions. Forgive with no strings attached, because that is how God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you.

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<sup>1</sup>See Ephesians 5:25-30

<sup>2</sup> See Ephesians 5:22-24

<sup>3</sup> See Colossians 3:21

God says, “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” And I know. All of this sounds good, but the divisions in your life are too great, right? You don’t know what he did to me, Pastor. You don’t know what she posted about me. How can the divisions among us and in us and throughout our world ever be taken away, be torn down, be healed, and united? There’s only one way. And it has nothing to do with who gets elected next. It has nothing to do with who gets the most likes on their tweets or facebook posts. It’s not about how many people you can line up on your side. It’s not even a matter of buying the world a Coke and teaching it harmony. True unity comes only as we humble ourselves before the Word of Christ, as Christ humbled Himself to win for us the forgiveness of sins.

The opposite of humility is pride. Division, all division, is caused by pride. Maybe it’s a refusal to submit to the Word of God, thinking you have better words than God does. Maybe the pride manifests itself in wanting to take credit. “I’ve got to make a name for myself.” But sinful human pride is never satisfied. That’s the position the unbelieving world is in. That’s why our divisions are getting deeper. There’s a word that floats around quite often online and in our media. We talk about “being empowered.” If only my group could be empowered then all the divisions would go away. Nonsense! Think about the Christian church. It is by and large the case that the church throughout its history is strongest—has been strongest both in terms of bringing the blessed influence of the Gospel and to others and its own members growing in faithfulness and godly living— when as an institution, it was weakest. It’s not when the church is empowered so much as when it is persecuted that the kingdom grows remarkably.

And this stands to reason, since the power to heal divisions lay not in Jesus' striking down His foes with lightning or sending a legion of angels to conquer His enemies but by suffering rejection by and dying at the hands of the very ones He came to save. The power for unity is in the forgiveness of sins earned by the Son of God who humbled himself in our stead, who took our sins upon him, and, now risen and at the right hand of God, pours out this forgiveness freely, willingly, and without conditions.

Therefore, "be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And notice that He doesn't say, "It's up to you to create this unity." Instead, we already have it! We already have it in Jesus! It's a reality. It's a gift. Unity in Jesus Christ. All we can do on our own is mess it up. All we can do is cause divisions and break what God has already freely given us. But God has seen our divisions and He knows their root cause. That's why He sent His Son—to live and die and rise for you and for me and for the life of the world.

"Can't we all just get along?" Sin is real and so is the division it causes, but sin does not get the last word. We have true unity in the humility of Jesus. As we hear His Word, we're humbled and brought to renewed faith in the forgiveness He won for us. Now when we look around, we don't see our enemies; we see our brothers and sisters in Christ. And in those outside the faith, we don't see our enemies but we see those for whom Christ died and who need to hear the good news of salvation. Come out of your rooms, leave your devices, sit down, and talk. And may our unity and our humility be together in Christ Jesus our Lord. God grant it for Jesus' sake.

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