

Sermon

Topic: Unity in Christ

Preached by Rev Murray Wills

St James' Church 8am Service and All Saints' 9am

Psalm 133

28 Aug 2022

Unity in Christ

In a divisive age, it's easy to get caught up in our many differences. From political beliefs to athletic affiliations.

And it's not helped by social media.

Amanda and I have been watching a programme on TVNZ on demand called *The Undeclared War*. It's about the real world of cyber security, and particularly, nation state hacking and manipulation of people through social media. In this case by government agents trying to destabilise countries by posting under fake names.

Some of our modern forms of communication are deliberately designed to be divisive and people and elections have been swayed by false online information.

Our Theme today is Unity, and our sentence for the day is from Psalm 133:1 *"How good and pleasant a thing it is when God's people live together in unity."*

Reading this sentence this week and realising its implications had me breathe several sighs of relief. Why don't you try it after me. *"How good and pleasant a thing it is when God's people live together in unity"*

I particularly like the promise in the last line of the Psalm:

Psalm 133

A song of ascents. Of David.

¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Don't you?

What do we mean by Unity though, particularly Unity in Christ.

First some definitions:

1. the state of being united or joined as a whole. (Oxford)
2. (a) the quality or state of being one. (b) the state of those who are in full agreement: harmony. (Merriam-Webster)

The Bible tells us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. For there is one body, and one Spirit even as we are called in one hope of our calling. One Lord, one Faith and one Baptism. One God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in us all, (Ephesians 4:3-6).

[Video]

Let's watch this short video that will speak to us about Unity and make us thirst for more.

What are some examples of unity in the Bible?

Bible Verses About Unity and Equality

- “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” ...
- “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” Ephesians 2:14 ESV.

In fact, there are 179 Bible Verses about Unity.

So that means we all have to be the same and think the same right?

Well, that would be pretty boring, wouldn't it, and what's more there are advantages that we would miss out on, and God would miss out on if we did all think the same. Christ's call was for us to be in Unity, to be as one as the Body of Christ but we

are not all the same, we can have unity and uniqueness, in fact we can, and should have unity and diversity.

We can achieve much more for God by combining our Gifts and talents and experiences and our discernment of what God is call us to be and do together.

There are fundamental things that we all agree as Christians. That's what joins us together, and that's what give us the ability to be a unified witness in society.

What do I mean?

Well as Christians we have the commandment including the commandment to love one another. Surely in fulfilling that there must be some unity. There are also the Creed's and there are two Creed's that in particular that bring us together in Unity:

The Apostles' Creed (p461)

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

There apparently up to 38,000 different denominations within
the Christian Church.

Despite the divisions within the Church that have happened
over the centuries, all the major Christian traditions continue to
acknowledge the words of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene
Creed in their worship and teaching.

Every time we come to say the creeds it is vital to reflect and
remember how it is that we come to believe them.

It is by the grace and mercy of God that we have come to faith
and are able to say and explore these words. It is not through
human cleverness or ingenuity. God is revealed through the
Scriptures. God is revealed most clearly through the gift of his
Son, Jesus Christ, and God makes himself known personally to
each believer through the work of the Holy Spirit.

And what a gift!

So, unity and fellowship with other believers is very important; so much so that Christ prayed that we would be one, as together, and not alone.

I love the times that we get together for the walk of witness, the pulpit swaps with SS Peter and Pauls and the things that we do together. These always celebrate our unity in Christ.

And I loved the IT strategy work I did at Caritas and the Salvation Army and the Anglican Centre for the same reason. My professional relationship there came from an understanding of the Unity we share.

One of the things I like about the Anglican Church is that it encourages individual scholarship. More than some other denominations it welcomes a diversity of opinions, and received in love and respect.

This then can promote mutual and dramatic growth in understanding the will of God, not only for individuals, but for the body of believers ready to be used by God.

A personal relationship with God is encouraged, and importantly, togetherness in mission and purpose is made possible.

Loving support, within a strong body of Christ, makes it possible to give and receive, which is a major purpose of the organisation we call “church”.

What are the ways that we encourage all of this in this Parish?

Study groups, home groups, pastoral care, AYM, book fairs, queens jubilee.

We are encouraged in our meeting together, our building up and our worship, but we are also called to be out there – outside the walls of the church, living our lives as God’s representatives, witnessing to his Love and discipling others. We are not an exclusive club that we come to once a week, you are all sales people, and you are on commission, the great commission in fact.

What I encourage in order to be in Unity and diversity and to inform our discernment of what God wants us to do in this community is to be a *thriving intergenerational and multicultural community sharing the good news of Jesus Christ..* But wait a minute – isn’t that our Vision statement??

Surely, given the community we are in, our discernment should be made up of all ages and multiple ethnic groups. That’s why it is important that everyone contributes. We need your voice, and we need God’s voice.

To conclude, let’s take some action, Let’s:

1. ***Commit to Unity – and to Appreciate Diversity While Honouring Our Common Need for Christ***

Life would be boring if we all looked, thought, or behaved in the exact same manner. Diversity of thought can strengthen us.

2. ***Love One Another***

Sometimes this is difficult — but it is essential

3. ***Commit to Equipping ourselves***

Through discernment of our gifts, through study courses, groups, and other forms of discipleship, and discernment of God's will.

4. ***Commit to Growing***

Let's commit to Grow the church. To enable our Mission Statement: *to love and share Christ* together, and our Vision statement: *To be a thriving intergenerational and multicultural community sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.*