

Bound Together

Part 4 of Sermon Series: *No Longer Strangers*

a sermon based on

Ephesians 4:1-16

and delivered on

August 5, 2018

11th Sunday after Pentecost (Year B)

at

Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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Today, we're continuing on this sermon theme No Longer Strangers, but maybe with a little bit of a difference – in that the focus is a little bit more on our relationship with one another. Especially today when we're preparing to receive Holy Communion – Communion a word that denotes unity or “commonness”, we're still confronted with the reality that the church (that's us) is not always unified or of one mind. This isn't anything new.

Charles V – when he stepped down as Holy Roman Emperor on August 27, 1556 – began to spend a lot of his time at his palace in Spain. In his palace in Spain he had six clocks. Remember this was a long time ago – clocks were expensive and rare. Charles noticing that he could never get the clocks to chime at the same time wrote, “How is it possible for six different clocks to chime all at the same time? How is it even more impossible for the six nations of the Holy Roman Empire to live in harmony? It can't be done. It's impossible, even if they call themselves Christians.”¹

Does it seem like that? You can't look at a newspaper, watch the news on television or call it up on your computer without hearing about the lack of unity in our country – that even if they call themselves Americans – Democrats and Republicans and those of use who are just plain fed up – aren't just suspicious of one another but dismissive – antagonistic. But that's in politics – not the church, right? Yeah, right.

One of the complaints (I think it's more of an excuse) but one of the complaints that I've heard from people telling me why they don't want to belong to the church – is that Christians are a bunch of hypocrites and they can't even figure out what they agree on. Look at all the different denominations. Which one's right? Obviously, I'm going to say The United Methodist Church.

But there's something to that suspicion. It's not new. Charles V made that observation 450 years ago, and Paul was addressing it almost 2,000 years ago in this letter to the Ephesians. It wasn't even the first time that Paul had to address conflicts in the church. But if we look at how he talks about what's expected we notice something.

When Paul points out that there are different gifts and different callings within the body of Christ (Gifts which are by Christ's measure to each) but these different gifts are cause for unity not division. He challenges the church to “grow up” to put aside the childish desire fed by some trickery (as he calls it) (Eph. 4:14). This is the same sort of thing that happens today. “I'm holier than Joe. He goes to work on Sunday. I go to church.” Never minding that Joe shows up for the church's work at the mission or the food pantry on his day off. Or maybe it's frustration that not everyone shows up to help with a church dinner or event. “But I always do.” “This person wants to do that project his way, but I know better.” Or we start to rank the service. Who's most important? Is it the pastor? I don't know. I read somewhere that Sunday School teachers have more influence in birthing new Christians. Is it the treasurer? the Trustees? the ladies who organize the dinners? The quiet lady who washes the dishes after the dinner? The kid who actually follows her pastor's suggestion that she just shout “Amen or Hallelujah” sometime during worship? (I'm still waiting for that, by the way.)

Paul is telling the church in Ephesus and us that although each of us has different gifts and different roles in the church – that all of those gifts and roles come from the very same Jesus Christ. This is the good news. God offers the same promise of life and possibility to all people

¹ Wayne Brouwer, *Preaching Today* reprinted in Craig Brian Larson, *Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Books, 1993).

and Jesus Christ assures us that each of us will receive sufficient grace to live as his disciples. Even those humble enough to accept the less showy gifts.

What did Jesus say in the Gospel lesson, today, “This is the work of God, that you believe in whom he sent.” (Jn 6:29) That doesn’t just mean that you believe Jesus existed or that mental assent that he’s the Incarnate Son of the Living God. It means living as he tells us to live. And what is the one command that Jesus gives us? It’s not the *Shema*, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” (Deut. 6:4-5) That’s the greatest commandment and Jesus acknowledges it. But what is the one command that Jesus himself gives us?

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”(Jn 15:12) Love one another. Love one another. But how do we love one another?

Let’s go back to those clocks that wouldn’t chime at the same time. Nowadays, it’s easy if you have an atomic clock to keep them synchronized – or at least they reset set themselves each night so that they stay pretty darn close. But....

Back in 1665 when the Dutch physicist, Christian Huygens (Hī – gěnz), invented the pendulum clock 100+ years after Charles V made his comments – Huygens noticed something. He noticed that the pendulums on the clocks would all start to swing in synchronization. The guy had to be pretty brilliant to come up with the idea of the pendulum clock and to make it work, but his idea of how they fell into harmony was a bit off. He thought that the clocks somehow “talked” to each other.

Then again, maybe he wasn’t that far off. In 2015, Henrique Oliveira and Luis Menlo published a paper on the phenomena. What they discovered is that pendulums actually create sound waves that end up bringing each other into synchronicity.² Mythbusters even did an experiment with metronomes to demonstrate the principle.

Those pendulums don’t even have to be exactly the same. The clocks can look different, they can have different faces, but the pendulums end up in synch. But there is one thing they all need.

They need to be close to each other. If my brother in Taiwan and I both start pendulum clocks swinging they will never match up. Start them while matching it up over Skype. It won’t happen. There’s too much interference between here and there for the sound waves from those pendulums to work their magic.

When Jesus calls us to love one another – he expects that we be near each other. Near each other so that we can start to appreciate one another, to appreciate our differences and how much we rely on each other if not for a particular skill or ability but because of how our place together frees me to live out the grace Christ has gifted me.

When we claim that bond together – when we acknowledge that Jesus didn’t just have my name on his mind on the cross but yours, as well, even when you irritate me – when we get beyond the childish temptation to even up any offense or “unfairness” we blossom and Jesus Christ graces us with a gift together that serves as a light to the world. AMEN.

² Henrique M. Oliveira and Luís V. Melo, “Huygens Synchronization of Two Clocks,” *Scientific Reports* 5 (July 23, 2015): 11548.