

**Christ Community Covenant Church
Communion and the Unity of Believers
Pastor Dave Scherrer – January 30, 2011**

Last week at the Town Hall I heard one of our members call our project on the east side a Unity Project. I was kind of intrigued by that.

Let's look at it backwards, in a household or a sports team or a school/business project:

What does disunity look like? There isn't a lot of unity in this locker room, school, or business. How can you tell?

How is unity restored in those cases?

What are the core character traits of unity?

The Bible is a text book on unity and disunity.

Probably the best living illustration out of the Bible involves taking a look at the nation of Jacobs's descendents, Israel. God's chosen people show the best and worst of unity. You remember they cry for a King and God gives them Saul. They are united but then a new leader rises up, young David the warrior shepherd. The nation follows David to unparalleled greatness followed by his son Solomon. But David and Solomon sow the seeds of disunity themselves (pun intended) by siring so many children by so many wives. There is infighting and the greatest nation on earth divides; Israel to the North with their 10 tribes, Judah to the south with their 2 tribes, Benjamin and Judah. Disaster follows with 19 Kings ruling over roughly 200 years. They fell to the Assyrians in 722bc. The southern kingdom of Judah didn't do a lot better; they had 20 kings over 340 years, eight of those Kings we are told by scripture were good.

The New Testament speaks to unity a lot. John 10:16 says "**There will be one flock and one shepherd.**" Later in John (17:23) Jesus prays to the Father "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." Paul writes to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10, 13ff) "**I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.**"

The Communion Table is a table of solidarity and unity.

1. The Lord's Supper is a call to unity under the headship of the Risen Lord

I Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

This unity of which Paul wrote is not one which the Christian can initiate; we are helpless to do that. This unity already exists in Christ but we who follow Christ must diligently preserve this unity. It is based upon our sharing life in one body, the universal church, the body of Christ under the authority of one head.

Ephesians 4:1-6

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul starts this section by calling attention to the fact that he is a prisoner. "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord." I think the answer is that he wants them to feel the truth that it is worth it. Walking worthy of our leader, of our King means following Him with radical obedience and unswerving loyalty. It is worth being imprisoned for and worth dying for.

Writing from prison means that what he writes is dangerous. It is not a nice, middle class way to solve your problems and be comfortable. Real, radical Christianity is risky and unpopular and dangerous. Jesus had given many warnings that following him was safe in the long run and dangerous in the short run. For example, Jesus said, (Luke 21:12-13)

They will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.

There is something very powerful about a testimony from prison where your life is at stake. That's the power Paul wants to put behind these words. The power we feel when we hear of Tahir Iqbal, a Muslim convert to Christianity who was imprisoned December 7, 1990, in Lahore, Pakistan, and died in prison July 19, 2001. He was a paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair. When asked about the possibility of being hanged he said, "I will kiss my rope, but will never deny my faith."

That kind of talk from prison is like a stiff, wakening winter wind in the face of our drowsy, television-soaked, self-pitying kind of Christianity. It wakes us up and makes us dress spiritually for the winter battles. That's what Paul wants to happen when we read his testimony from prison.

This unity is bought and paid for by the strength and character of the leader we all follow. Whether we like each other or not we follow the same commander and that makes His purposes higher than our own comfort or control. We are unified because He unifies us. Pretty simple and this meal is all about that.

Do you know that He prayed for us that we would be unified, just before he died? He prayed for the disciples and for all who would believe through their testimony that we would be unified.

John 17:20-23

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

So the table is about us taking together the supper as a testimony of our unity through the loyalty we all feel to Christ alone. For this reason I will most often give the instruction that communion is only for those who have put their faith and loyalty in Christ and Him alone. It is not **a casual event**, but **a sacrament**.

You just said and rightly so, unity is maintained in part, by leadership. I actually think it starts there. In the face of trial and subordination and drifting priorities, selfishness, only great coaching, or teaching or leading can redirect the focus and even cast out the distraction or distracter.

I said we must be unified whether we love each other or not but that is not an option.

2. The Lord's Supper is a call to love one another.

Francis Schaeffer wrote a book only 35 pages long called the Mark of a Christian and in it he captured the imagination of a generation of believers in the 70's. He said there is a non-negotiable sign of what a true believe is like: they must love their fellow Christ Followers. He based his little book on this verse:

John 13:34-35

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The love that we have for each other and the unity that comes from that is the single most compelling evangelistic tool that we have. In this day of technological relationships and *Face book* but not face time, community is compelling.

You see God has a way that unity first begins with a worthy leader and cause, but as all experienced foot soldiers know, when the fire is intense, it is not the love or flag and country that creates the "charge" – it is the love and commitment of the soldiers' fellow soldiers that moves him in that moment.

You see, so many very different people all loving God so devotedly is compelling.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 25-26

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 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. . . . That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

You might think that so many different people with so many gifts would be distracting and contribute to disunity, but it is not so. What this wonderful diversity reminds us is that the ministry is not the work of a few paid staff but of us all. Our unity under Christ is the positional unity, but the body life of the spiritually gifted is the practical unity of believers. If one member suffers we all bleed, if one rejoices we all celebrate.

Unity does not imply uniformity. It does not mean that all Christians will think alike or perform identical ministries. It does imply a common purpose and interdependence within the body of Christ.

To every individual within the body of Christ is given a particular capacity for ministry. This capacity (or capacities) is commonly called a 'spiritual gift.' Although the particular function involved may not appear to be particularly 'spiritual,' the outcome is spiritual benefit to the body of Christ. For example, there is seemingly little difference between writing a check to the mortgage company and one to say Dallas Seminary. The difference is that in giving to the seminary, men are being trained to teach and preach which will bring growth and blessing to many Christians. The man who has the gift of helps may fix the washing machine of one of the saints, not only meeting a very real need but saving money which can be used in the Lord's work and bringing real encouragement and blessing to the one helped.

The immediate goal of the ministry of gifted evangelists and pastor-teachers is expressed in verse 12: "for the equipping of the saints." The Greek word rendered 'equipping' is a very interesting term. It is used with the idea of equipping ... of the fitting out of a ship ... of the fitting out of an army ... of developing certain parts of the body by exercise. It is also used of restoring or putting something in order ... of mending nets and preparing them for another day's fishing (Matthew 4:21) ... of pacifying a city torn by faction ... of restoring a limb that was dislocated (cf. 'be made complete,' NASV, 1 Corinthians 1:10).

In both senses of this word the pastor-teacher is like a coach. He strives to equip his men for winning ball games. He endeavors to tighten up flabby muscles and to train men to play well. In addition he must also work in such a way as to get the men playing as a team. Petty squabbles and differences must be dealt with.

Men must be united in spirit and working toward a common goal. Such is the responsibility of the pastor-teacher as well. Shaping up the saints and getting individual members of the body of Christ to work together harmoniously.

The saints are equipped for ministry. What an amazing reversal has occurred. Christians are often not turning the world upside down, but the Scriptures upside down. This passage tells us that the ministry is the saint's work, not the preacher's. We say that the preacher is 'in the ministry' but Paul says in Ephesians 4:14:

"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

Communion

So then Communion is an act of Community. The Community of God - Father Son and Holy Spirit having the very intimate act of dining with the Community of Believers.