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One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism Ephesians 4.1-6
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I want to begin today by thanking my wife Jill for stepping in on short notice and preaching last week so I could preach at Cape Cod Church while Ben and Tammy Feldott were coping with her surgery for a brain tumor. I'm happy to report that Tammy is recovering so well she was able to attend their son Cody's high school graduation yesterday!. I also want to thank our staff and volunteers, so many folks were here on Friday and Saturday – our Deacons, the Caring Heart to Heart Team, Media Booth, Chris, Joe, even Corbany Greemore in the nursery – who all enabled us to serve the families of Joan Corcoran and Harry Mirick as we had services to celebrate both their lives. Then last night we had a Gospel concert by Greater Vision and Geoff Larkin and Chuck Hilton stayed late to help the guys pack up all their equipment.

This past week, I also had a committal service for Nina Gregson's mother Shirley Lindstrom on Monday, so I had two services for mother's this week and one for a dad. In a healthy family, no one loves you the way your mother does, a mother's love is unique, and a mother often serves as a source of unity for a family. Siblings can be very different and sometimes seem to have little or nothing in common, yet they're united by their bond to their mother who hopefully loved, nurtured, sacrificed, educated, and cared for them. One woman (Elaine Heffner) noted, *"The art of mothering is to teach the art of living to children."* Mother's do this by deeds and by words. Mothers have truths and sayings they teach their children, these can vary from one mother to another, although there are some that seem to be universal. Like, *"If you don't have anything nice to say....don't say anything at all."* *"I am not your...maid."* *"Are you going out...in that?"* *"Call me when you... get there."* *"Do you think I'm made of... money?"* *"I was never bored when I was... your age."* *"How many times do I have to... tell you?"* *"Enough is...enough."* That probably is. Each mother also has things she says in particular. One of the things my mother always said to me, and my sisters was, *"Be your best self."*

There is a sense in which **Ephesians 4:1-6** is about a similar dynamic to the one I've just described about a mother's role in a family. For Paul, the Spirit helps to unify the different people who compose the church, the way a mother can be a source of unity in a family with several children. In these verses, Paul is basically urging the

individuals who make up the family of God to “*Be your best self,*” and he mentions some of the qualities that make up that best self.

Before I read the scripture, I want to note that if you listen closely you’ll hear four of the nine fruit of the Spirit mentioned by Paul. He returns to those virtues repeatedly in his letters. Two of the main themes we find in Ephesians are about the power of the Spirit and unity in the church. Pastor David preached about unity last month because that was a concern in the church at Corinth as it was in Ephesus. Unity is a vital quality for a healthy family, a healthy church, and a strong nation. As a church member, a family member, and a citizen you contribute toward unity or division by what you say and do. As I read Ephesians 4:1-6 listen for the call to unity and oneness in the church.

*“I therefore, **the prisoner in the Lord,** beg you **to lead a life worthy of the calling** to which you have been called, ² with all **humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,** ³ making every effort to maintain **the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** ⁴ There is **one body** and **one Spirit**, just as you were called to the **one hope** of your calling, ⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,** ⁶ **one God and Father of all,** who is above all and through all and in all.”*

Unity within churches across America has been stretched and challenged over the past few years. The world has become more polarizing, causing people to take sides on a whole host of issues. We need to guard the unity of our church. For God to move in our church, it needs to be united—no matter what’s happening in the culture and around the world. So how can we maintain unity in the church when the surrounding forces are trying to tear it apart?

Here are five ways you can protect the unity of our church.

Develop an attitude of acceptance

Accept people where they are, not where you want them to be. Don’t major on minor issues. You don’t need to insist that everyone agrees with you on every minor detail.

Romans 14:1 says, “*Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters*” (NIV). Notice that Paul recognizes there are “*disputable matters.*” You won’t agree on everything with everybody, and you don’t need to for there to be unity in the church.

Focus on our common purpose.

First Corinthians 1:10 which David focused on in May reminds us, *“I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. **Let there be no divisions in the church.** Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose”* (NLT). Focusing on a common purpose leads to unity. That’s why we encourage everyone to go through our membership class. In that class, we lay out the purpose and focus of our church. I wouldn’t want to join a church unless I knew what the church was about, and I don’t expect others to do so either.

Control your tongue.

The Bible says gossip is sin. What is gossip? Gossip is when you’re sharing a problem or criticism with someone who is neither part of the problem nor part of the solution. When you listen to it, you become a partner in it. **Ephesians 4:29** says, *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”* (NIV). Don’t let gossip fester within your circles of relationship.

Encourage the support of leaders.

Hebrews 13:17 says: *“Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and **they are accountable to God.** Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit”* (NLT). It’s not the part about people obeying leaders that concerns me. It’s the part that says, *“They are accountable to God.”* One day I will give an account before God for the people I’ve lead. God will hold me accountable for the direction of the church and the spiritual maturity of those I’ve lead. That’s a tough task and all the pastors and lay leaders in the church need your encouragement and support.

Practice God’s method of conflict resolution.

Matthew 18:15-17 gives us a plan to follow when the unity of the church is under attack. When you have a problem with someone, go directly to that person. If that person doesn’t listen, bring along another witness. If the person still doesn’t listen, bring them before the entire church. What happens if the person still doesn’t listen? You treat them like an unbeliever. You still love them, but you don’t treat the person like a member. Unity is the responsibility not only of the pastors and lay leaders, everyone who is part of the church plays a part in strengthening unity or weakening it, for building

the strength of our faith community or weakening it by what we say and do. Jesus tells us that our unity will be a witness for him (John 13:35). Paul says we build unity in the church by focusing on what unites us – we have *“one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.”* We’re called to emphasize what unites us and to relate to one another with humility, gentleness, patience, love, and peace as Paul writes. If we treat one another this way, unity will naturally grow and deepen.

Who is someone you know who embodies the qualities Paul describes - ***“humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love.”*** When I think of someone who embodies those Christian virtues, I think of my wife Jill, and another person is Fred Rogers who was the focus of the 2019 movie, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* starring Tom Hanks. Better known as Mister Rogers, Fred Rogers was the host of Public Broadcasting’s longest running television series. *Mister Roger’s Neighborhood* began when I was in pre-school. I can remember coming home and watching the program when I was 4 and 5 years old. Of course, I had no way of knowing that 30 thirty years later the interim pastor I would follow at Brewster Baptist Church, Dr. Bill Barker, was the voice of Dr. Bill & Elsie Platypus, two of the characters I saw on that program as a child.

I remember when Fred Rogers died that part of why I was sad was because I fear that so much of what he embodied is no longer valued or practiced by millions of people in our country especially by many people in positions of power and influence in politics and in the media. As one editorial observed at the time of his death, Mr. Rogers was ***“a model of kindness – a trait not coveted enough these days. Being rich appeals to people. So does being hip, connected, and successful. But kind, patient, and friends with the delivery man doesn’t seem to carry the same clout.”***

When asked whether he ever got tired of playing Mr. Rogers he replied, *“My wife says what you see is what you get. It’s not hard for me to be me. This program is not a show.”* Ted Koppel spoke of what a kind, gentle man Fred Rogers was and shared how Mr. Rogers had won two Peabody Awards, four Emmy’s, and the nation’s highest civilian honor the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Fred Rogers spoke slowly, calmly, and gently. He listened. His way of being on television is the polar opposite of what one sees on many programs today. Too many shows feature yelling, bad manners,

rudeness, interruptions, insults, a lack of virtue, and demeaning speech rather than genuine dialogue, listening, an attempt to understand and to think deeply.

Mr. Rogers, who was an ordained Presbyterian minister, also said something that takes us back to Ephesians. ***“There is a universal truth I have found in my work. Everybody longs to be loved. And the greatest thing we can do is let somebody know that they are loved and capable of being loving.”*** PBS President Pat Mitchell said about Fred Rogers, *“He is somebody who is completely integrated. He is somebody **who is what he believes**. His life and his work and who he is inside are one person.”* For those of us who follow Christ, we can have no greater tribute: **that we are what we believe**. We are to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called with ***“humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love.”*** If you find yourself upset with someone because of something they said or didn’t say, because of something they did or didn’t do, the first thing you can do is check yourself and ask yourself, “Am I responding to this situation with **humility, gentleness, patience, love, and peace?**” Your answer can shape what you do next.

Paul believed so strongly in Christ and what a difference Jesus made in a person’s life, that he was willing to go to prison for the Lord. Paul is writing the church in Ephesus from prison, where he may have been in chains, urging each person in the church to be *“making every effort to maintain **the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**”* What holds the different members of the church in place is not the fetters or chains that held Paul in prison, rather it is the fether, the **bond of peace**. Are you making every effort to do that? To, *“maintain **the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**”* This Saturday I’ll be performing the wedding for Judy Turpin’s granddaughter and her fiancé. As at so many weddings, they’ll exchange rings which are a symbol of love which has no end and also are a visible sign that Katy and Andrew are bound to each other for life. When two people get married, they quickly learn that *“making every effort to maintain **the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,**”* is a wise way to relate to one’s spouse. Both in a marriage and in church the saying is true, ***“In essentials, unity; in doubtful questions, liberty; in all things, charity.”***

Jesus came to show us how, through reliance on him, we can best live in the world as it really is. The Spirit is the one who reminds us of all Jesus taught and unites

us, as different as we may be individually as brothers and sisters, into one family, that is the church. Together we share **“one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God who is above all and through all and in all.”** It is up to you to welcome the one Spirit into your life and to strive to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace in the church. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510) described opening her life to the presence of the Holy Spirit this way, **“It is as if I have given the keys of my house to Love with permission to do all that is necessary.”** Are you willing to do the same?

Prayer: Lord, we want to grow in Christlikeness and want to be instruments for unity and not division in the church and in our world. Help us surrender to you and to give the keys of our house to your Spirit, letting you have complete control. Give us the trust to invite you into every room. Don’t come as an occasional guest who we are relieved to see depart or to whom we don’t open everything – enter and become the Owner of the whole house. We do not want to turn our eyes from you, O God. There we want them to stay and not move no matter what happens to us, within or without.

Adapted from a writing by Catherine of Genoa.

Blessing Ephesians 3.20-21

20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. If someone asked you why you should do all you can to work for the unity of the church, as Paul says in Ephesians 4.1-6, what would you say?
2. Take note of every “one” mentioned in Ephesians 4:1-6. Underline them in your Bible or write them down. What is significant about all these “one’s?” Why would Paul stress them to believers and to the church?
3. How would you describe the Holy Spirit? Look back at Ephesians chapter one for help as to who the Spirit is and what the Spirit gives you.

- 4 What does it look like practically for you to have only “one Lord?” What does this say about your devotion and allegiance?
- 5 Ephesians 4.6 speaks about “*one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*” What does this mean?
- 6 Identify at least one thing you can do to bring about more unity and harmony in Christ’s body and commit to doing it.