

“May They Be One”

INTRO:

- Context of ANCC journey: heading into the new which is really going back to the old. Centrality of Jesus; discipleship and the early church — one of the key hallmarks of the Early Church was their unity.
- Max Lucado: most powerful and miraculous thing in Acts is the unity of the church.
 - We know there are at least 3,000 believers at this point; they are different nationalities; different occupations; different social status. Just the disciples were diverse (tax collectors, fishermen, zealots, carpenters, pharisees, women, gentiles...)
 - **Acts 2:44** *‘All the believers were together and had everything in common’*
- Could the same be said of the Church today? What about just the Church in the UK? What about just our All Nations Church family?
- There are more than 30,000 denominations of Christianity across the globe. Denomination: an autonomous branch of Christianity; having the freedom to act independently. One of the top criticisms that non-christians make against christians is that they can’t agree. This is not what the early church were like. This is not God’s heart for the Church.

What do I want listeners to take away from this message?

- 1. Unity Is God’s Idea**
- 2. Unity Enhances Function**
- 3. Unity Is the Best Witness**
- 4. Unity Starts With Me but Is a Work of the Holy Spirit**

PRAY

1. UNITY IS GOD’S IDEA

A. It was priority to Jesus

- **John 17:20-23**

‘...I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one — 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.’

- Two times in this passage Jesus prays that believers would be one. Could have prayed for anything (less persecution, greater boldness to declare the gospel, signs and wonders etc) Instead, he prays for the unity of believers.
- If unity between believers is a top priority to Jesus it ought to be a top priority to us.

B. It is modelled in the trinity; we are made in His image

- *‘May they be one as we are one’*
- From the beginning of Genesis we see the unity between the Father, son and Holy Spirit
- Though there is much reference in the Bible to the Father, son and Holy Spirit. There is no place that describes them as three, they are only ever referred to as one.

C. How the early church started: first of something good indication for its design

- As we read earlier, Acts 2:44 ‘all believers were together and had everything in common’
- When we look at the first of something, we can see how it was intended to be.

- **Original function: stone water jars illustration** — supposed to be functional and not merely decorative. Just as these stone water jars have a meaningful function beyond being merely decorative, the bride of Christ has a function
- In the same way, perhaps we need to go back to the original purpose/function.

2. UNITY ENHANCES FUNCTION

- **1 Corinthians 12:12-26**

Paul uses the human body to explain unity within the church. It is not that we are all identical; it's not that we look the same. Just as the body is made up of many parts (organs, eyes, bones, feet). Each part is needed but each part only finds its purpose within the body and not in isolation.

- If the Church is the body of Christ, then we each have a unique role to play. Our differences in role do not undermine that but in fact enhance it.
- **We all have a part to play** — Mindset needs to shift: from consumer (What can I receive? What can you teach me?) to one of contributing (What is my role? What can I bring? What part can I play?)
- **We need each other** —
 - **Story:** apple bobbing in the bath with hands tied behind our back
 - Requires cooperation with others to serve a wider purpose
 - **Story:** CU at University; diverse and made up of many denominations and backgrounds. At first, sceptical. I had heard things of other denominations — I felt, in reflection, I was the enlightened one. I understood and Christians that were different just didn't get it. I was wrong. They made up the majority of attendance.
 - We all see in part; We were created for unity (we are made perfect when we are united and are lacking in isolation).
- **Jesus leads us** —
 - Well whose right? Whose wrong?
 - Submit to the Head of the body (**Colossians 1:18** — he is the head of his body the church).
 - “When Jesus is at the centre of the church: people with a diversity of backgrounds love and serve and love each other. Prejudices and biases are replaced with love and grace. Peace, not conflict, is the goal of all our relationships” Max Lucado
- **The function is souls** —
 - The function is fulfilment of the Great Commission; the function is winning the lost; the function is working in God's harvest field.
 - When we are one, these things will become a by-product

3. UNITY IS THE BEST WITNESS

- **Illustration:** In court, if every witness gave conflicting testimony/undermined other witnesses, the jury would be left very confused. The church is to be a witness for Christ, when we contradict each other we're not making a good case for Christ.
- **John 17:23**
Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.
- **John 13:35**
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

- When the church is one, it is a **witness** to the world that (1) Jesus came from the father and that (2) the father loves us as he loves the son.
- It works: the early church modelled unity and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
- **Illustration:** Natural parents look good when children get on.
- The world is divided (political party division; division between the rich and the poor; division between those born in the country and those who have immigrated). The world does not need a divided Church.
- *"I have never yet known the Spirit of God to work where the Lord's people were divided"* D.L. Moody

4. UNITY STARTS WITH ME

- If we all make up the body of Christ, we each have a part to play in unity; 'each part must do its work' (Ephesians 4:16)
- Unity is the primary strategy of heaven and division is the primary strategy of hell; we must guard against division on every level.
- Jesus asked for unity because he knew it would be under attack.

A. Avoid division (take thoughts captive, watch your words)

• **1 Corinthians 1:10**

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.

- **Illustration:** Division of the Church starts with one divisive/judgemental thought about one of its members. The church is the people. We have to stop it at this point.

B. Devotion to the things that matter

- The early church didn't run a unity campaign and yet they were made up of many nations and backgrounds; oneness was a by-product of their devotion and focus. They probably never preached sermons on unity...
- We **devote** ourselves to (Acts 2:42):
 - The apostles teaching; (Bible; dad's apostolic leading)
 - Fellowship; (home church, meals in each others home)
 - Breaking of bread; and (centrality of the cross)
 - Prayer (prayer hub)

C. Bear with one another

• **Ephesians 4:2-6**

Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- Overlook offences; in a family there are certain habits and traits that perhaps wind you up. You learn to bear with those because we're family. Whether its leaving the door open, not picking up the laundry etc

D. Unity is not striving — depend on the Holy Spirit

- We need the Holy Spirit's help; it is not striving

- Unity is so contrary to the culture of the world; it is so against our nature to prefer others, to die to self, to overlook offences.

CONCLUSION:

- To the....thank you for helping us to...
- Baptists — rediscover the importance of full immersion baptism
- Methodists — reclaim faith in Christ and true discipleship in smallgroup
- Anglicans — holding a high standard and recognition of the Church in the nation
- Pentecostals — rediscover baptism in the spirit and the vibrancy of Spirit led lives
- Catholics — sent many martyrs out to the nations
- Lutheran church — helped bring reformation at a time when the Church was drifting
- Early house church movement (50s,60s,70s) — rediscover freshness of community and grace
- Black churches come into the UK - power of prayer and all night intercession
- Salvation Army — see the importance of meeting the needs of the poor and for all the work that you have done in social justice.
- To all those I haven't mentioned

PRAY

- **Romans 15:5**

'May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'

Jesus, would you take central place in your Church once again. Father, we reject the ugly spirit of division and disunity. We choose to embrace your picture of oneness. Would you help us? Would you give us your grace and your heart. Amen.