

Unity Sunday, February 7

Definition of Unity: Unity is being in harmony or one in spirit. The state or quality of being one or united into a whole.

Other words for unity: uniformity, unanimity, unification, cohesion, togetherness, uniqueness, consistency, cohesiveness, **oneness**, unison, solidarity, reconciliation.

What words come to mind as you think about unity?

As we come to think about, look at and get in touch with what unity is for the Body of Christ we need to start with Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 4:1-6 he writes these words: ***"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*** NIV

In essence as the Body of Christ we are to remember who we are and whose we are as we do everything possible to not only maintain the Body of Christ – the Church – but to be building it up as well.

Do you think we understand the meaning of unity as Paul talks about here? What are some of the obstacles that get in the way?

In our scripture passage for today from James we are going to find him addressing some key factors to the breakdown of unity. Let's take a look at what he has to say: James 3:1-18

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. 3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-

loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. NIV

James opens by addressing those who would teach sharing that those who do will be judged more strictly. We live in a time when it seems as though a lot of people have something to say about anything and everything. James warns that we must be careful as our tongues can get us into a lot of trouble.

Did you know that we speak at the rate of 120 to 180 words per minute and that we can listen and process at the rate of 400 to 800 words per minute. What this says is that we have the capability to not only process what someone is saying, but to also run ahead and think about our response. What sounds like a good thing turns into something negative as we tend to stop listening to what the other is saying and pay more attention to what we want to say.

It has been said that God gave us two ears and one mouth. What might happen if we developed a posture of listening twice as much as we speak?

Is it possible that we have far more chaos in our lives than we do unity because we tend to talk over the top of one another instead of really listening to what the other is saying? Can you think of a time when you experienced this? What was that like? What did it feel like?

What changes need to happen in your life in order to become a better listener? A better communicator?

James also speaks about wisdom which he says is not always imparted so much as by what we say, but rather by how we live our lives. ***13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.***

Being careful and intentional about what we say and how we live our lives, especially as Christians, comes from both humility and wisdom. If we go back to what Paul says about unity in Ephesians he too speaks of the importance of humility and gentleness.

What does humility mean to you? What tends to get in the way of humility? What changes in your life need to take place in order for you to take a posture of humility?

Concerning wisdom James says, ***“the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”***

James wants us to understand that there is a difference between worldly wisdom and that which God imparts.

What words jump out for you as you consider James words concerning wisdom? What changes need to happen in your life in order to live your life out of God’s wisdom?

What can we begin to do to bring about unity within the Body of Christ?

How can we help those outside the Body find their place?

What changes need to take place for this to happen? How might we become agents of unity in our community? In our world?

How open are you to allowing the Holy Spirit to use you as an agent to bring about unity?

Unity February 14

This week we continue to look at and consider unity. As we look to James once again we find him addressing the cause for the breakdown of unity. Let's look to what he has to say in our passage for today.

James 4:1-12

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. 11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you — who are you to judge your neighbor? NIV

James speaks of quarrels and fighting and addresses the cause of them by pointing out that much of our strife with others and even with ourselves comes from unchecked desires. We tend to be a people who want what we want, when we want it and do not care how it affects others.

Would you agree or disagree with that statement?

Would you agree or disagree that when we allow our desires to go unchecked that it can lead to quarrels and strife which in turn leads to disunity?

As James talks about desires he says that often we do not receive what we want because we ask with the wrong motives. In essence we think more about what we want than what God wants. We allow ourselves to fall into the trap of thinking the way the world thinks instead of as God does.

How might feelings, relationships and situations change if we began to focus on what God wanted as well as what is best for the Body of Christ?

What personal changes might we need to make for this to happen?

How can we help one another in this process?

James calls for us to stop being double minded and to humble ourselves before God.

As God speaks through James what do you hear Him saying to us?

What does it mean to you to humble yourself before God?

What changes need to take place in order for that to happen?

James concludes by calling us to quit being judgmental. He calls us once again to practice humility – before God and others.

Do you think, as we hear these words, that we feel that they are for us or do we believe that they are for others around us?

How open are we to allowing the Holy Spirit to show us where we fall short?

How open are we to allowing the Holy Spirit to show us the places where we need to change?

How willing are we to allow the Holy Spirit to begin to effect those changes in us?

How can we help one another in this process?

What needs to begin to take place for us to move to that place of unity as the Body of Christ?