

“Real and Lasting Unity Found in Jesus”
(John 17:20-26)
Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. We thirst and yearn for unity, esp. when it is so very hard to find these days. Kind of like looking for water in a parched desert. For example, I feel differently about this current election cycle. I was old enough to have interest in the process in the Reagan-Carter days, was very interested during Bush-Clinton-Bush, and have tracked the political process with much interest ever since, but this time it just seems different. I’ve never witnessed so much mud-slinging. I’ve never heard so many *ad hominem* attacks against persons which effectively skirt the substantial issues. To complement the trash-talking, the walls of separation and disunity fomenting in our great nation only seem to be getting higher. If nothing else can be said for the two leading candidates representing the two major parties, we can say at the very least that they are -- and this seems fairly self-evident -- polarizing. In a recent speech this past Tuesday after the Indiana primary, I heard the candidate elaborate upon his vision of a coming unified nation and I asked myself, “What fantasy-world is he living in?”

This demonstrates by the way why the Church can never latch onto a political platform. The two kingdoms – the kingdom of the left which includes political government and the kingdom of the right which stands for the Church and kingdom of grace – when they are confused or fused leads to disastrous consequences. Charles Colson once made this observation:

Because it tempts one to water down the truth of the gospel, ideological alignment, whether on the left or the right, accelerates the church’s secularization. When the church aligns itself politically, it gives priority to the compromises and temporal successes of the political world rather than its Christian confession of eternal truth. (CTCR: *Render unto Caesar...and unto God: A Lutheran View of Church and State*, 1995. 60)

This is all the more reason that as Christians we don’t pin our hopes on political leaders. Yes, we must be good stewards of the political process as citizens of our land. Yes, it is good to try to be a positive contributor to the political process. A year ago I reached out to our congresswoman Mimi Walters to offer any support I could give her for her pro-life position, but having said that we do not put our trust in princes. We put our trust in the Lord. But when we see the level of disunity in our great land, we understand all the more why the Word of God leads us not to treat any civic leader as a panacea.

It is helpful, however, to take note of what we inherently understand about our strivings for unity: platform and action belong together. If someone espouses a Democratic platform, then it stands to reason that we should expect their action to back-up that platform. What we say and what we do go hand-in-hand. And it is fairly certain that if there is be any semblance of unity, then at the very least those who comprise any group will have unity of position as well as unity of action.

This seems universally true. In the military there is unity of purpose while upholding the values of God, country, and unit and then follow-through with actions that express a special comradery between soldiers. They not only express common goals ideologically, but they behave in such a way so as to depend and trust one another with each other’s lives.

What we say and do must go hand-in-hand if any unity is to ever exist.

On this Mother's Day, I am filled with so many fond memories that reinforce this idea. My mother's love was constantly confirmed. She was always supporting my dad; and she was always taking care of us children. She seemed tireless. She cooked our meals, washed our clothes, got us to our doctor and dentist appointments, and she was always there for us when we needed anything. Her actions expressing and indicating love were dauntless (they still are even as my mother Josephine is 90 this year). The last time I saw her she took two of my kids out shopping for early birthday presents since she anticipated not being able to see them for their birthdays. That's my mom and I know many of you are thanking God for mom's like this today, some of whom are still with us and others of whom are now in heaven.

But while growing up, that love had substance behind it. We were always loved, and while being loved we learned that that love represented something: a code, a way of life, a worldview if you will. We were to take the love and learn to be honorable people, hardworking people; children conscientious of the fact that their words and actions never just occurred in a vacuum, but in fact reflected on the whole family. My mom would warn us kids that if we ever did something wrong, then others would say, "I guess their parents didn't teach them any better!" Our lives would (and did) reflect their lives. My brother Robert once told my mom that while he was in college, he always found himself thinking, "What would mom think if I did this or that?" And this mere consideration would impact what my brother would do next. This illustrates that good moms have this sort of impact: they pass on a legacy of love, but not an aimless "love," but one with meaning and real expression. So again, what we do and what we say must go together.

And yet how we struggle with this right? How often do we find ourselves contradicting what should be the case for us as those who confess the love of God? We confess God's love which means that we believe that God also forgives us in and through His Son. Imagine that: God forgives all our sin and yet when it comes to the follow-up action, how easy it is for us to withhold forgiveness from someone who offends us. This is when our "platform" and action are incongruent and in this we see our sin. It is a big problem, because such a contradiction hurts our living in the unity that we are called to confess and live in actively and faithfully. When we do not live in unity and only contribute to the walls and "us vs. them" mentalities, we betray the platform of Jesus Christ and we instead replace love with hostility. This is no way to live. It is destructive, not only to the souls of others, but to our souls. Hatred is like a cancer and some divisions can destroy (though there are some other divisions that demonstrate faithfulness to God). The point for this sermon, however, is for you and me to know a greater unity.

This unity I speak of now, however, is not a hypothetical or a fantasy (like the one I mentioned earlier in regard to the presidential candidate). This unity is something that has already been established.

Last Sunday Pastor Mueller gave us an excellent overview about our own prayer experience. How often it feels as though God has not answered our prayers. There are so many reasons as to why we might have this perception: sometimes we ask God with wrong motives, sometimes we just pray for the wrong thing; sometimes the Lord answers the prayer, but we

don't even perceive it; sometimes He makes us wait for the answer, etc. etc., but we have to back-up and see that when our Savior and Lord Jesus prayed to the Heavenly Father as He did in the High Priestly Prayer in John 17 that – first of all – he actually prayed for you and me. At verse 20, our Gospel from John 17 says: “[Jesus said:] I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,” that includes you and me!

So the Lord prayed for you and me, but notice what He prayed for at verse 21: “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.”

This is an amazing revelation. Of all the things the Lord could have prayed for, He prayed that we would know unity, but not just any kind of unity, but the unity that is even known between the Father and the Son (within God Himself). And this for an express purpose: so that living in this unity we would have the awesome privilege and mission to show the world this unity that more than anything else testifies to the very Gospel: that the Father who loved the Son sent the Son out of His great love for sinners.

But there is something to know clearly about Jesus' prayer, since He is the Lord: the answer to His prayer for our unity was never in question, but a prayer that of course was answered and provided for by the Father. Let me be clear: Jesus' prayer was answered! In spite of our sin, in spite of our contribution to disunity, in spite of our rebellion, and in spite of our hatred, we have been given unity by grace through faith in Christ and it is a substantial one that is real and lasting; a unity of “platform” or belief and a unity of life and action.

And this unity is affirmed in the reality of God's platform and action towards you. You've heard people say, “Talk is cheap,” and “actions speak louder than words,” etc., but our Lord Jesus didn't just talk about love. People want to know where the God of love is! Just hear the Gospel. He went to the cross to die for you. Maybe we have to be better at translating this: the Father and the Son loved you so much that He covered all of the anti-love stuff in your life with His life-love-blood; His blood that covers sin, and despair, and suffering, and every anti-love thing in this universe...all of it was covered by His blood so that separation and strife and walls and disunity would be covered by God's unity...ALL sin, ALL sinners, covered by the blood of the Lamb.

He backed up His words; he backed up His platform...He kicked it into action and through the greatest sacrifice ever given, He guaranteed that the Father loves you with an everlasting love.

When we go forth in the love of Christ and we love other people, then we affirm that the God of love is real, that the Gospel that guarantees God's love for sinners is real. So there I was at the Misty May Sports Center in Irvine for one of my son's basketball games and for that matter the basketball game also played by another member in our congregation: both Bryan and Joshua Bradford play on same club basketball team. But I'm standing there looking out upon this mass of humanity and basketball and volleyball uniforms of every color and all at once, one man, with one shirt, with one message stood out. His shirt had these words in large, bold letters: “I love haters.” What a bizarre message right. What did he mean by it? I don't know, but the longer

I stared at his shirt, the more I started liking it. We are the haters, but God sent His son for us; we were the ones lost in disunity and strife, but Jesus prayed for our unity, and died and rose for it. We are now the loved ones and this is the basis for our real unity with God and it is the basis of what we now offer the world: we can love haters since God loved us. We may proclaim to the world that the love of God is real as we choose to love even in the face of division. We can share a unity that is of Jesus Christ that is greater than any division...for our families, for our congregation, for our communities, for our nation, and for our world, for God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. And this love which is already yours Christian has given you also unity, unity with God and unity with His Church so that side-by-side we would proclaim the love of the Savior to a world that is dying for unity.