

## **“Brought Together” – Pr Jim Sprenkle – Friendship Sunday – August 28, 2022**

- I. **Ephesians 4:1-6** – previously read
- II. **I want to take you back to a time when people got along...**
  - a. You know, back in the days when people agreed on everything and loved each other no matter what their background or ethnicity.
  - b. Oh wait... that never happened.
  - c. You see, Adam and Eve were the first humans – and we can say that they had a perfect unity with God and each other when they were in the Garden of Eden.
    - i. However, we know that they broke God’s only command to stay away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
    - ii. From that moment of rebellion and disobedience, humanity has never “gotten along” because sin became a part of each person.
    - iii. By the way, what happened to the first children on earth?
      - 1. Cain killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8)
  - d. Over the centuries, as more people inhabited the Earth – things only got worse.
    - i. Not only was sin and evil coming out of every person – but more people meant more sin and broken relationships.
  - e. I spoke to someone on a flight home from Indianapolis in July about the troubles with society.
    - i. We talked about how people seem to do a lot of selfish things and not look out for the other guy... and she said something along the lines of, “People should just do the right thing!”
    - ii. I had a chance to explain our sinful condition at that point because left to our own devices, we will consistently do the wrong thing!
      - 1. In fact, without God’s rescue and the love of Christ transforming us, we cannot do the right thing by God.
  - f. No, humans have a long history, even from the beginning of creation, in strife and conflict, along with selfishness and pride.
- III. **Now I want to take you back in time when the Church got along...**
  - a. You know, back in the days when people agreed on everything and loved each other no matter what their background or ethnicity.
  - b. Oh wait... that never happened... except perhaps in Acts chapter 2.
    - i. In Acts 2:42-47, it says that the first Christians got along great and had all things in common. (Acts 2:44)
  - c. However, as time went on, the Church found struggles and trials with different people coming together.
    - i. St. Paul, who wrote our Letter to the Ephesians today, was an Apostle who reached out to the Gentiles.

1. Gentiles are those people outside the Jewish faith – people from all over the modern world at that time who did not follow the Jewish way of life.
  2. Paul reached into their lives and brought them Jesus, and they became a part of the family of faith too.
  3. Unfortunately, other Christians were not in agreement with how to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (vs 1).
    - a. Many of the Christians who had Jewish history and family wanted these Gentiles to follow their way of life... which meant getting circumcised, eating certain foods, etc.
    - b. Paul disagreed with these demands and said that Christians are free in Christ without carrying out the Law to satisfy God.
    - c. These things were discussed at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and the early Church leaders agreed to welcome all people into the faith.
  - d. It is difficult when we have high expectations for people in the Church to do the right thing, and we see all kinds of failure... especially in ourselves.
    - i. How many times do we see a television preacher or famous pastor who sins against God and the people he serves?
    - ii. How many times have we spoken to one another harshly?
    - iii. When did we have no empathy for someone going through a hard time and needing support?
    - iv. How many times have we jumped to conclusions about why someone acted a certain way, or thought badly of their situation without knowing what was really going on?
    - v. When did we look down on people of other ethnic or racial backgrounds or make assumptions about them?
    - vi. When did we last gossip about someone and hurt their reputation?
  - e. God wants all of us as Christians to live in the unity He gives us... which Paul says this way, “[Walk in] humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (vss. 2-3)
    - i. Did you catch the last part? Maintain the unity of the Spirit
      1. It doesn’t say create it... or develop or build the unity of the Spirit... it says maintain it.
      2. This means the unity is already there, we are working to maintain what God has already created!
- IV. **Only God can overcome the division and conflict** that comes from sin.
- a. By the way, who is overjoyed when division and conflict are happening in the Church and world?

- i. Yes, satan is always hard at work to divide and cause strife among people – and especially wants us to turn away from God’s love.
- b. A great victory was won though – a victory over satan and his desire to cause trouble... and a great victory over our own sinful hearts too.
- c. I said it to the person on the plane, but we have no good in us... and we cannot choose the right thing without a major intervention.
- d. That intervention came in the form of God Himself – Jesus Christ.
  - i. It was God’s love for us that was poured out in Jesus, as He loved us all so much that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Jesus would not be separated from God forever because of sin, but have eternal life (John 3:16)
  - ii. Jesus was and is God’s solution to the problem of sin and how it was passed along to all of us.
  - iii. By allowing Jesus to be crucified, God’s perfect justice that we deserved was satisfied in the death of His Son.
    - 1. And how do we receive this “Not guilty” verdict?
    - 2. We come to believe that Jesus really died and rose again for us
    - 3. Jesus died for me, and He did this for my salvation.
- e. All who believe in Jesus are now free to maintain the unity that is already in place by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- V. **I am especially happy to look around today** and see the unity of the Spirit.
- a. We have people from all over the world who have been brought together by God’s love.
  - b. The strangest thing to say about us is that we are a family.
    - i. God’s will for us is not just simple friendship, but as Paul says in Galatians 6:10 we are a “family or household of faith.”
    - ii. Friends may not always be there for you, but the chances of family being there for you through the highs and lows of life are much better.
    - iii. The Church is a family, brought together by the Holy Spirit, forgiven by the work of our Lord Jesus, who strengthens our faith by our Baptism, and we live under our loving Father. (Ephesians 4:4-6)
  - c. As Paul encourages us to live together as an extended family, we know that it takes a miracle of God to keep us “bearing with one another in love.” (vs 2)
    - i. Yet, do you not see how God has brought us together?
    - ii. Some are old... some are young... some speak Spanish... some speak Mayan... some speak German... some come from poverty... others have disabilities... some grew up Christian... others came to Jesus later in life...
    - iii. Yet, God has seen fit to bring us all together to “bear with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (vs 2-3)

- d. Look at all the people around us and praise God that He has brought us together to live as Christian brothers and sisters in Christ – as a family.  
Amen