

14th Sunday of Pentecost, Sept. 18th

Sermon title- “Unity in Community”

A few weeks ago I attended the Faith Lutheran High Schools first home football game with my daughter. It had been a long time since I had been to a High School football game. After the game I asked Savannah questions about the details of the game and she couldn't really tell me much. She knew that Faith had won, but she could not tell me who scored the touchdowns or what the final score was. She could tell me who she met, who she sat with, what the kids were talking about, but she did not know the name of the quarterback or the name of the High School that Faith beat. I imagine that is the way it is for a lot of the kids that went to the football game. After I paid the admission price and had entered through the gate to watch the game the first group of kids that I saw were loitering around the picnic benches; they were the Middle Schoolers. They were in small 'herds', each were talking a mile a minute not really paying too much attention to the game. Then I came to the first block of bleachers where many of the High School kids were in a 'flock', sitting, talking, and laughing with one another with calmer voices like birds on a wire. Then came the middle bleachers where some of the kids were but there I saw most of the adults who probably the most intent on watching the game, like a 'gaggle' of mother geese looking for a safe place to land. And then, at the very end were many of the Faith teacher's fellowshiping with one another like a 'gam' of blue whales watching over each other's kids. And who can forget the snack bar surrounded by both adults and kids like bees swarming around a honey comb. But what I learned about life from my first Faith High School football game is this...life is about relationships. What's fun about going to high school football games is kids get to hang with their friends...relationships! (Real Life Ministries Illustration)

So what is it that really makes a church vibrant or healthy? I wish I could tell you this morning that what draws unchurched people to a particular church is its emphasis on pure doctrine, important as correct doctrine is. I wish I could tell you that what really makes a church a magnet for the non-believing world is its emphasis on a certain types of worship or having a screen up front which may be beneficial. In my some 30 years of experience in visiting all kinds of churches in countries all over the world those which are the most vibrant or healthy...who are drawing all kinds of people through its doors...are those churches that have an 'intentional strategy' of getting all kinds of people into relationships.

And that truth should not be surprising to any of us! Did you know that half the world's population belongs to Facebook? That the number of minutes the population of our world spends on just Facebook in one day alone is equivalent to 100k years? The challenge of today's teenager is how many friends can I get to join my Facebook page? Having close meaningful relationships with others is a basic need of human beings. God himself is a relational God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God created man to be in relationship!

In the Gospel lesson Jesus prays for 3 things;

1. He prays for himself.
2. He prays for his disciples.
3. And he prays for the believers yet to come, you and me.

Jesus knew the Church would last through the ages!

In Peter- Jesus saw Pentecost.

In John- Jesus saw the Church in Ephesus.

And when Jesus saw the gap where Judas once had been he saw Paul and all the Churches of Asia and Europe....and the Church crossing the sea eventually forming here, even in Las Vegas. Jesus saw all who yet would believe the Word of the original 11. And in the Gospel lesson, when Jesus prayed for the Church, He prayed for one thing-UNITY! Jesus prayed that the church would be one, the night before his death on a Cross.

If the Church would ever have an impact on the world there would have to be Unity in relationships. You see, we live in a world of disunity, disunity in the Government, disunity in our families, and disunity in the workplace.

So when the Church comes together, when there is community of people in close relationship with one another who through the supernatural power of God become unified..... it is a powerful witness, so much so that the world will be drawn to the Church and God will be glorified. That's what Jesus was praying for!

But what does oneness mean? What does Jesus mean when he says, "Make them one."? Does that mean we all have to agree on everything, that there should be no difference of opinions? What does Paul mean when he says in the Epistle lesson that believers should be of one mind?

Unity in the Church is like a box of crayons of many varied colors, different sizes, some newer, hardly used, while others have been well used. All of us have had different experiences in the Church; have been exposed to different worship styles, different approaches. Some are newer to the Church, newer to the faith; others of us have been part of a church all our lives.

Some crayons have had their wrappers peeled back and are exposed, like some believers who have made mistakes in their lives and show evidence of suffering and pain. Younger believers have their paper intact. Yet what is interesting is that all these different crayons fit back into the same box they were taken out of, they all fit together tightly in one box.

God has designed the Body, the Church to be his dwelling place, and he has determined each player or member to be just who he wants them to be and we each have to be actively listening to those whom he has brought together in the one box. Our oneness in relationship is the result of faith and our faith joins us together in Christ. There can be no oneness without faith and there

can be no faith without the Word. Jesus is that saving Word that brings us together under the same cross in one baptism which produces in our hearts the forgiveness of sins and life together in God's forever family. If the world sees unity among Christians, they have a basis for concluding that Christ is sent from God. If they do not see unity among Christians, they have a basis for assuming that Christ is not sent from God. So the unity issue is vital and strategic as a witness of the Truine God in the world. It is not incidental.

We are Gods colony on earth in relationship with him and with one another. Let us embrace one another in relationships and like a 'drove' of cattle let us graze together in the fellowship of God's grace and his love, forgiving one another as a cow chews its cud over and over and over again.

Pastor Toby Joeckel