**Why Unity is Necessary**

(All passages are taken from NIV)

**Key Passage** ***Ephesians 2:12-22, 3:8:11***

(Text in bold may be ideal for slides)

*A good way to start might be to share a local story, in your context, of people coming together in unity and the Spirit of God moving in a powerful way.*

I want to ask a question this morning: **Is unity necessary?** And if so, **Why?**  Should unity in the Church be different or stand apart from unity in the world?  Again, if the answer is yes, then why? Why is unity important to the church? What does God desire to do through unity?

Open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter two, we will start reading at verse 12… As we walk through this passage I want to point out four unity truths.

In the previous verses of chapters one and two of the book of Ephesians Paul has laid out for us many of the amazing blessings we have because of what God accomplished through Jesus Christ.  It is a beautiful portrait of who we are as the followers of Jesus and who we are as His church.  And as we get to verse 12 of chapter two Paul wants to make sure we understand that something profound happens to us as a group of believers.

***Ephesians 2:12-22, 3:8:11***

***12Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.***

***14For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.***

***19Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.***

Jump down to chapter 3 starting in verse 8

***Chapter 3:8-11***

***8Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, 9and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

***-*Pray**-

There is a fundamental problem with our question: Is unity necessary? Or why is unity necessary? The better question is, Are we or are we not united?

And this brings me to the first unity truth…

**Four Unity Truths**

 **1. We are united**

In this passage the Apostle Paul makes a series of declarations.  These declarations are in present tense not future tense.  In verse 14 he writes,  ***For he himself is our peace…***

Through him we have peace with God and because of the peace we have with God we also have peace with one another.  ***14For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility***…  peace is a central theme of Paul’s writings and there is an obvious and important connection between peace and unity.  One cannot be at war and be at peace.  Through Christ this is settled. We are at peace with God and at peace with one another.

It is possible that we need a fundamental shift in thinking. Unity is not what we are working for but rather it is what we are working from.  The present tense definitive statements of Ephesians make it clear that unity has been accomplished through Jesus.  The second part of verse 14 reads that Jesus…  ***has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility***

The “dividing wall” Paul is referring to is a wall in the temple that was erected as a barrier separating the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Israelites.  There were signs posted that made it clear that any Gentile that entered the inner court would be killed.  That was indeed a wall of hostility.

Not only did Jesus symbolically tear down the dividing wall but as we see in verse 15-16  ***His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.***

His purpose was to bring peace and tear down the wall and create ***in himself*** ***one new humanity…***

This work is accomplished, it is done. In Christ whatever conflict we may have between one another is settled.  In Christ we become a “new humanity” or said differently a new race.  This “new race” is also described in ***Galatians 3:27-29*** *where we read…*

***27for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.***

This can be a confusing passage because our experience tells us that in reality when people say yes to Jesus they do not stop being Jews or Gentiles, they don’t lose their cultural ethnicity, nor do they give up their gender.  So then what is the writer saying?  We are ***clothed with Christ***.  Visualize an outer garment that covers all your under garments. Christ is to be covering us and everything else is to be beneath or under our identity in Jesus.

Our new identity covers or goes over all other identity markers.  Our identity in Christ goes over or covers our ethnicity, our social standing, our gender, our education level, our political leaning, or any other marker. Everything else is to be wrapped inside or clothed in Christ.

To live into what has been accomplished we must hold our “new humanity,” this new race, in Christ Jesus above any other identity marker that we have, be it rich or poor, black or white, male or female, educated or uneducated, young or old, Democrat or Republican.

Speaking of political affiliations, have you ever wondered how much tension there must have been among the disciples when Jesus chose Simon the Zealot whose political view was to overthrow the Roman Empire and rid Jerusalem of the occupation and Matthew the tax collector who was employed by the very group Simon wanted to overthrow?  They may have had some intense conversations. There might have been some conflicting ideologies, but at some point they had to hold their identity as disciples of Jesus above their political leaning.

So this is the second Unity truth…

**Four Unity Truths**

 **1 We are united**

 **2 We sabotage unity when we hold any identity marker above Christ**

The question is: are we willing to first and foremost have our identity be in Christ?

Here is the test: Any time you avoid moving toward someone to know them, to be in relationship with them, because they have a different identity marker than you, it means you hold one of your secondary identity markers above your primary identity in Christ.  Here is the hard truth: If you are not interested in moving toward someone because they are a Democrat then your politics are held above Jesus.  If you look down on someone because they are wealthy, or a female, or a laborer, or Hispanic, or… or… or… you have made what God intended to be secondary, primary.  When we do this we put up our own “wall of hostility.”   We fail to let go of the very thing Jesus came to destroy.

*(This is a good place to get real and share a personal story or illustration of putting up walls of hostility by holding a personal identity marker above Christ…)*

If we are honest with ourselves we discover we are all guilty of getting our priorities mixed up and holding an identity marker above Christ and in turn we sabotage unity.  We are all guilty of putting up a wall.  There are those even in the church we avoid because they are different.  When we do this we fail to live into and out of the peace Christ has bought for us.

The good news is God’s grace is sufficient, the good news is because of Jesus unity is ours to take hold of.  It has been purchased and made possible through Christ, peace is ours, hostility is put to death, and the wall is removed. Unity is ours! And God has made us diverse; our different identity markers are part of the beauty of the kingdom and creativity of God. The challenge is, are we living with those identity markers always under our identity in Christ?  Are we laying aside our identity markers, our whiteness, our blackness, and living into our oneness?

Jesus’ ministry was marked by challenging the social norms.  He talked to people society said he should not talk to.  He touched people society said he should not touch. He redefined the existing identity markers for the sake of the Kingdom.  He challenges us to do the same. Jesus said in Luke:

***Luke 14:12-14***

***12Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”***

In the ancient world eating a meal together was a form of acceptance and an invitation to community. To eat with the “right” people was a way to gain social status.  In some ways it is the same today.  This culture put a lot of emphasis on who was at the table. So Jesus challenges his first century listeners, and us, to invite the marginalized, the overlooked, the people who were and are considered untouchable and unclean.  Invite the poor, the crippled, and the lame; invite those who have no way of reciprocating.  Jesus is telling us to hold on to something greater than social status or cultural identity markers. He is telling us to do it for the sake of unity.

Let’s continue our look at Ephesians. In Christ the wall of hostility is broken, we have unity, and as we see starting in verse 19…

 ***…you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.***

Verse 19 says, “you are.” This is another definitive statement of reality, “you are,” fellow citizens, one household built on a foundation with Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone…

And the passage says that the church united in Christ Jesus is a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.  And this is the third unity truth

**Four Unity Truths**

 **1 We are united**

 **2 We sabotage unity when we hold any identity marker above Christ**

 **3 The Spirit of God moves through our unity**

When we come together in unity the Spirit of God is in our midst and moves in powerful ways.  Deuteronomy 32:30 says one can chase a thousand but two can chase 10,000. This coming together is not a matter of addition 1,000 plus 1,000 equals 2,000 it is multiplication when working alone they could only chase 2,000 the two united can chase 10,000. Imagine when we come together by the thousands… Matthew 18:19 says that if two of you agree…it shall be done. Something profound happens when we come together in unity. God moves in powerful ways.

We see it in the early church in Acts 2 when everyone is together and unified God does miraculous signs and adds to their numbers daily.  We see revival when the people in Nehemiah come together in unity to build the wall and reestablish Jerusalem and a place for the people of God.  We see the presence of the Lord descend on the tabernacle after the people come together in unity to build it.  Unity unleashes the Spirit of God. Unity is the precursor to revival.  If we want revival in Detroit we must live into the unity Christ paid for.

This brings us to the fourth unity truth:

**Four Unity Truths**

 **1 We are united**

 **2 We sabotage unity when we hold any identity marker above Christ**

 **3 The Spirit of God moves through our unity**

 **4 Our unity makes God known**

Look at chapter 3 verse 10

***10His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

God’s intent was and is that the unified church, with all of our God given diversity, would come together in unity and make known the manifold wisdom of God.

Why is unity necessary? Because our unity shows off God’s power. Our unity is an outward expression of the very character of God who exists in perfect unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  We make the wisdom of God known as we live into and out of the unity Jesus made possible through the cross.

In the Gospel of John chapter 17 Jesus is praying in the garden before he went to the cross. He prays:

***John 17:21***

***21that 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.***

Through the cross we are one, the wall is destroyed, we have peace with God and peace with one another. When we live into what Jesus did for us, when we live into our unity, the outside world will ask: How is that possible?  How are those people who are so different, so diverse, all getting along and loving one another?  Our unity ought to confound the world.  Our unity is what God wants to use to draw people to his Son.

Why is unity necessary? Because it is God’s design to make Jesus and the mysteries of God known in the physical and spiritual realm.

The story of the Gospel is that Jesus laid down his place and his position and lived among us as one of us, Jesus took on the very nature of a man and not just a man but a servant and not just a servant but a servant that laid down his life so that we can be one, so that we can be united with God and united with one another. The high price was paid for our unity - it’s time to live into it make Him known.

*(If you opened with a local story you could tie the points of this sermon back to that story and highlight the four unity truths)*