

“Serving in Unity with Love”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
August 5, 2012 – John Knox Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 4:1-16 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from who the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Who has braved the heat and attended Symphony on the Prairie this summer? I loved to go hear the symphony play. Music has the amazing ability to take us to a moment in time as it did when my high school friends went to go hear the ISO play Bee Gees music. The disco music took us back to days at Ben Davis High School. Music can be soothing as it did when the night I heard the Broadway tunes from “Phantom of the Opera”. I can hear the rich baritone voice, who sang the “Music of the Night”. Music can make us want to get up and march as it did the night the ISO performed all the patriotic 4th of July tunes. I am married to a musician, an orchestra teacher and I was in the Ben Davis Band years ago. So I have been taught a few things about music.

To make music, a musician must be skilled and trained so that they can read the notes. A person cannot be handed a trombone, having never laid eyes on one, and be expected to play it. To play in a symphony, orchestra or band, a musician must be willing to work in unity with the rest of the group to make the music come together and sing. Musicians must be humble as not everyone can play harmony or first chair. I love to hear a solo or one particular instrument play out but not everyone can do this. You must have someone playing second and third chair so that there is richness and fullness in the music. There are times when the unified group must get quiet so that the person singing can be heard. Musicians must be patient. They must be willing to rest and wait to play their part. If the cannons went off early in the “1812 Overture”, it would not be the “1812 Overture”! A musician must practice. A musician must listen and watch the conductor. A musician must work at being part of the whole body so that the symphony, orchestra or band can make music.

The church in Ephesus must have been having trouble making music. It was clear that the church was struggling to work together in unity. The author of the letter is stressing humbleness, gentleness, patience and love. The word “one” is used seven times in 2 verses. *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”*

This reminds me of that inspirational poster where it says, “There is no ‘I’ in ‘Team’.” There is no ‘I’ in body. There is no ‘I’ in church which is the body of Christ. We are all called to serve in this body. But the body cannot function if there is not humbleness. If everyone wants to be the leader, the church can’t function. If everyone wants to be in the background, the church can’t function. The body can’t function if there is no patience, gentleness and love. The letter is saying you all have these wonderful, beautiful gifts that God has given to you. Different gifts, yes, gifts given to you to work together in harmony. These gifts will help you make beautiful music if you will use them correctly.

The number 68 is important when it came to the week of VBS. That is the number of adults that made this week come together and make music. This is more help than we have every received. Of course not all these people were teachers. Some were teachers, some were helpers, some did not come every night, some did not come any of the nights of VBS but helped set-up or clean-up, some donated large amounts of food, and some prepped craft materials. All these people came together to teach 98 children about God. One teacher shared that one of her children was so excited about what she was learning she went home and shared it with her parents.

This number did not include the 7 youth and 3 adults who were in Colcord, West Virginia doing mission work there from John Knox. They were also building the Body of Christ and serving together in unity. This number did not include all the

people out there who were praying that VBS and the youth mission trip would go well and that we would be the hands and feet of Christ. God's church, John Knox, was rock'in it the week of July 16-20!

I know it is not about the numbers. This may go back to my days in business when numbers were used to show productivity. We as the body of Christ were being productive. We were using our gifts. We were answering a call to serve. We were serving with humility, gentleness, patience and love. We used our gifts to equip others to do ministry. In most organization when it comes to special projects, there usually are 30% of the people doing all the work and the church generally is no exception. But this was not the case for us and I want to thank you. This is huge and I wonder what more we can do.

Things don't always go so well when serving in a church. I am sure that you have experienced this when you have served on a committee or project. You may wonder, "Why am I doing this?" You may not agree or have different opinions about the ideas or the way things are being done. It is difficult sometime serving. The letter to the Ephesians does not have anything in there about serving the church and it being east. There will be times where it won't be pretty and it will be tough!

Our General Assembly met the first week of July. There were not a lot of changes proposed to our constitution as the body was torn on many of the issues. But from reading the editor's note in this month's "Presbyterian Outlook" titled, "A Wonderfully Difficult GA", it sounds like God's presence was felt. All the difficult issues especially the marriage issue was centered on prayer. It was said the hot topic committee spent more time in prayer than they did in discussion. It was voted down 338-308 and it is clear that we are divided on this. These are tough issues and these are good people. I will admit I did not watch much of the download streaming where you can go online and watch it live. I urge to go the PCUSA website and read the outcome of this year's GA as well as there is this brochure that Frank has made available in the office.

I have heard from commissioners who were serving and from this article that this GA was very political. There was difficulty getting into a rhythm and the only music which was made was in their time of fabulous worship together. Jack Huberer, the author of this article, ends his article by saying, "I come away with an ache in my belly – knowing that we have not yet captured the spirit of unity in diversity that marks healthy families. We don't yet know how to disagree graciously. We need to cultivate more of the wonderfully prayerful, open part of our life together and diminish the difficult, contentious part." (Presbyterian Outlook Magazine, PCUSA publisher, July 2012 issue)

We are human and the church is made up of humans. It is clear that we are not always perfect. We, like the church in Ephesus, are given the gifts to serve in the church and we are also given the sweet gift of grace. God knows we have flaws and egos and those will sometimes hinder our work as Christians. We are reassured that God is there, forgiving us with true abundance and love.

Christ gives us this meal (communion) which we celebrate today. We come to this table as a community and none of us are worthy but we are all welcome! One of the things I love about our Presbyterian polity is that we cannot partake in this meal by ourselves. We are required to share this meal in community with each other. Even when Frank or I go to serve this meal to a home bound member of the church, we will take an elder or deacon with us to share this meal with them. The body gathers to eat this bread and drink this cup, we remember the gift of salvation and grace we are given in Christ. We remember that Christ shared this meal with his disciples not one on one but together. The disciples were not perfect but they strived to serve Christ faithfully. They did not always agree with each other but they united with each other to build the church. So, come to this table today with love for one another sharing in this meal, knowing that Christ loves you beyond measure.

May you take that love of Christ with you. May you hold this love in your heart so when you are challenged with seeing someone in a group of people who has challenged or hurt you, you are able to go to that person with an outstretched arm with grace and love. May you hold the love of Christ in your heart when you wake up and have a day where you have meetings that you fear will be filled with conflict. This love and grace will not take the hurt or the conflict away; but knowing that Christ is with you every step of the way and that you are called to serve *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* Amen.