

Sermon Followed by Service

March 27, 2022

Ephesians 4:2-6

It's beautiful, isn't it? Blah burlap with marks of black and gray; blah burlap with messy marks of ash and oil. It doesn't sound beautiful, but it is beautiful, isn't it? You look at the marks and they can be so different. Reminds me of how different we are. The people who made those marks - some of us are young, some old; some have soft and tiny fingers, some have big, bent, gnarly fingers; some of you have been here making your mark in one way or other for decades, some of you not so long; some of you dipped into the dish boldly, some dipped hesitantly; some pressed down hard, some wiped softly. We're all different, aren't we? And our marks are different.

At the same time, we are all the same, and our marks are all the same - messy. Out in the world, and here in church, our hearts and minds, our lives are all messy - messy with sin and guilt, messy with hurt and heartache, messy with failure, messy with death and dying. Here we made, and here we make our messy marks together, confessing: "I'm no better than you." Here, we make our messy marks together, confessing together: "God, have mercy on me a sinner."

And with our messy marks, we made the mark of a cross, the mark of Christ. One by one we confessed: "Jesus is my Savior, my Lord, my life, my peace, my hope." One by one, and together as one, we confessed: "Jesus is our Savior, our Lord, our life, our peace, our hope." One by one, and together as one, we confessed: "Jesus lived for me and for you; Jesus died for me and for you; Jesus rose back to life and he rules with his power and his promise for me and for you." One by one, and together as one, we confessed: "I'm forgiven and you're forgiven. He's got me and he's got you. I'm going to heaven and you're going to heaven." One by one, and together as one, we confessed "we, us, and our" - "We are forgiven; he's got us, heaven is our home." Beautiful, isn't it?

That's just a taste of the oneness our Father has for us in heaven. Last week, Jesus gave us another taste as one by one and together as one we came to his Supper. At that same time, the Spirit in you gave us another taste of our oneness. When I heard you singing: "The Church's One Foundation," I just wanted to stop what I was doing and sing with you - **"Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth. Her charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth."** One birth - a couple weeks ago we shared that one birth into one family, the Roberts family of five into Jesus' family. A couple weeks before that, we welcomed a family of three generations - Martina, Emma, and Katerina - into our family. After the service they thanked me for letting them be part of - what did they say? - "your church." What did I say? "Our church; their church."

In this world, Satan is so hard at work to divide us from God and from each other, to set us against God and against each other. And it's not just Satan; I have a sinful nature in me that is so determined to set "me, myself and I" over God and everyone else. (I'm not alone in that, am I?) Put "Mme, myself, and I" together with Satan and what do we see in our world? A world of hurt and heartache, envy and jealousy, conflict, anger, hatred, evil turning us against God and against each other. And sometimes just as hurtful, we see a world - and maybe a church - forgetting, ignoring, rushing on by.

Can I tell you something else we see, and get to share, in this world? Jesus sent by the Father, Jesus with the Spirit calling, gathering, bringing us together as one, giving us tastes and tidbits of heaven. Heaven, where we will enjoy perfect peace with God. Heaven, where we will enjoy perfect peace with each other. Heaven where we will enjoy life the way it's supposed to be, love the way it's supposed to be, family the way it's supposed to be - all of us, all of Christ's church, together in Jesus the way we're meant to be.

Sounds good doesn't it? But what about now? Already now, we already have a oneness with God; already now, we already have a oneness with each other. We may not always see it, feel it, experience it in this world, but there is a oneness with God and his people that is already true. Because we don't always see it, feel it, experience it And because Satan, the world around us, and "me, myself, and I" inside us are so against that oneness, Paul says: **"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."**

"Make every effort." Oneness, togetherness, isn't always easy, is it? When we see people we don't know, what can come easily is to avoid or stick with people we know instead of trying to reach out and connect - "let someone else do the connecting thing." When we've messed up, done wrong, hurt someone, forgotten someone, what can come easily is to blame and excuse instead of confessing and asking for forgiveness - "let someone else do the apologizing thing." When someone else is wrong and breaking their oneness with God, when someone else is wrong and hurting our oneness with each other, what can come easily is to pretend it will be ok - "let someone else say the hard things." But the Spirit who calls and gathers us together, he knows better: **"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."**

So even though we might feel awkward with people we don't know, we reach out to connect. Even though we might not like to apologize, we admit our wrong and ask forgiveness. Even though we might not like difficult conversations, we pray for the courage to speak up with the heart of Jesus. Why? We see what Jesus and his Spirit have done for us; we see the effort they have made for us, to bring us together with God, to bring us together as part of Christ's church. And seeing what Jesus and his Spirit have done for us, it just sounds so right, doesn't it? - **"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."**

There's something else I'd like to talk about. Our oneness isn't just here. Jesus and his Spirit have us working together with about 1000 other congregation across the United States - congregations like us with people like you. Together, we "confess the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church ... to be faithful to the Word of God." Together, we promise to "support with our prayers, time, talents, and offerings, the work our Lord has given us." And together, with Jesus and his Spirit, we reach around the world.

In our service folder, we have a list of church bodies around the world - we are brothers and sisters with them, working together to share the life and the love of Jesus. In our service folder, we have another list, a list of countries around the world, where we are working to bring people the peace of Jesus. And another list, of places where we are working together to connect churches together in the Truth of Jesus. Isn't it amazing what we get to be part of? Isn't it amazing what we get to share? And so **"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."** Amen.

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church

A Family Connecting in Christ

March 26 & 27, 2022

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY... we are divided by flags, school colors, language, race, sex, money, and more. When we consider what sin does, we see many more dividers.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY... we see how the Creator and Lord of the universe seeks to bring us together - in Jesus.

OPENING HYMN

"O Christians, Haste"

Hymn 901

O Christians, haste, your mission high fulfilling,
to tell to all the world that God is light,
that he who made all nations is not willing
one soul should perish, lost in shades of night.

Refrain

Publish glad tidings, tidings of peace,
tidings of Jesus, redemption and release.

Behold how many thousands still are lying
bound in the dreary prison-house of sin
with none to tell them of the Savior's dying
or of the life he died for them to win. *Refrain*

Proclaim to ev'ry people, tongue, and nation
that God, in whom they live and move, is love;
tell how he stooped to save his lost creation
and died on earth that they might live above. *Refrain*

Send heralds forth to bear the message glorious,
give of your wealth to speed them on their way;
pour out your soul for them in prayer victorious;
O Christians, haste to bring the brighter day! *Refrain*

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

**If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

Holy God, gracious Father,

I am sinful by nature

and have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions.

I have not loved you with my whole heart;

I have not loved others as I should.

I deserve your punishment both now and forever.

But Jesus, my Savior, paid for my sins

with his innocent suffering and death.

Trusting in him, I pray: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Silence for meditation and reflection

Our gracious Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY

CW 174

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

Lord of the church, you have united us in faith and worship to make disciples of all nations and nurture believers for lives of Christian service. Guide us and our leaders, and help us all fulfill our responsibilities with patience and understanding. Keep us and the congregations of the synod faithful to your Word, and give us all a willingness to support the worldwide mission of your church to the glory of God; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Listen to me, you islands;
hear this, you distant nations:
Before I was born the LORD called me;
from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.
He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me into a polished arrow
and concealed me in his quiver.
He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."
But I said, "I have labored in vain;
I have spent my strength for nothing at all.
Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand,
and my reward is with my God."
And now the LORD says—
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him
and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD
and my God has been my strength—
he says:
"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 98A

Refrain



All the ends of the earth have seen the pow-er of God.



All the ends of the earth have seen the pow-er of God.

Tone



Sing to the LORD a / new song,
for he has done / marv'ulous things;
his right hand and his / holy arm
have worked salvation / for him.
The LORD has made his sal- / vation known
and revealed his righteousness to the / nations. *Refrain*

Shout for joy to the LORD, / all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with / music.
Let the rivers / clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together / for joy;
let them sing be- / fore the LORD,
for he comes to / judge the earth.
He will judge the world in / righteousness
and the peoples with / equity.
**Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
and to the Holy / Spirit,**
as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain*

SECOND READING*Ephesians 4:1–6, 11–16*

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION*Ephesians 4:3*

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

GOSPEL*John 17:20-23*

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that 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.

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me— so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, O Christ!

HYMN OF THE DAY

“Son of God, Eternal Savior”

Hymn 729

Son of God, eternal Savior, source of life and truth and grace,
Word made flesh, whose birth among us, hallows all our human race,
you our head, who, throned in glory, for your own will ever plead:
fill us with your love and pity, heal our wrongs and help our need.

Bind us all as one together in your Church’s sacred fold,
weak and healthy, poor and wealthy, sad and joyful, young and old.
Is there want or pain or sorrow? Make us all the burden share.
Are there spirits crushed and broken? Teach us, Lord, to soothe their care.

As you, Lord, have lived for others, so may we for others live.
Freely have your gifts been granted; freely may your servants give.
Yours the gold and yours the silver, yours the wealth of land and sea;
we but stewards of your bounty held in solemn trust will be.

Son of God, eternal Savior, source of life and truth and grace,
Word made flesh, whose birth among us hallows all our human race,
by your praying, by your willing that your people should be one,
grant, O grant our hope’s fruition: here on earth your will be done.

SERMON

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

NEW MEMBER WELCOME (SUNDAY)

Friend(s) in Christ,

St. Paul described the unity that exists in Christ's church when he wrote, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." With sincere joy we welcome you to the fellowship of our congregation.

As you know, believers in Christ regularly gather around his Word and sacraments, encourage one another in faith and life, and carry out the work of his kingdom. The Scriptures encourage us: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

You have come to worship today to confess your unity with us and to take your place as a part of this faith community. I now ask you:

Do you acknowledge that in Baptism, God gave you the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation? If so, answer: I do. **I do.**

Do you reject the devil along with all his lies and empty promises? If so, answer: I do. **I do.**

Do you believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? If so, answer: I do. **I do.**

Do you believe all the books of the Bible to be the inspired Word of God? If so, answer: I do. **I do.**

Do you believe that the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as you have come to know them, are faithful and true to the Word of God? If so, answer: I do. **I do.**

Do you intend to continue steadfast in this teaching and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away from it? If so, answer: I do, and I ask God to help me.
I do, and I ask God to help me.

Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word; to be faithful in the use of the Word and Sacrament; and in faith and action remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as long as you live? If so, answer: I do, and I ask God to help me.
I do, and I ask God to help me.

With sincere joy we welcome you as *a member(s)* of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Brothers and sisters,

As we welcome *these new members* to our Christian family, I encourage you in the name of Jesus to keep *them* in your minds, hold *them* in your hearts, and pray for *them* again and again. Show *them* the face of friendship and offer *them* a hand of support. Encourage *them* with your “works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the

faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

The peace of Christ be with us all. Amen.

Gracious Father, we thank you for leading [name(s)] to desire to become a member(s) of our congregation and for giving them joy to confess their faith to us. Guide us with your wisdom as we worship and work together. Mold our minds and hearts in a single Christlike will so that we may be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

HYMN

“In Unity and Peace”

Hymn 732

Refrain



How good it is and how pleas-ant to live in u-ni-ty and peace.



How good it is and how pleas-ant to live to-geth-er in one Lord.

(Last time only)



to live to - geth - er in one Lord.



- 1 In the name of our Lord__ Je - sus Christ, a -
- 2 Live a life that is wor - thy of your call, be
- 3 Share the love that has joined_ us as one, u -



gree in ev - 'ry-thing you say. — May there — be no di-
 hum - ble, gen - tle, and pa - tient. Bear with each oth - er in
 nite in spir - it and i - deals. — Nev - er be ri - vals, do



vi - sions a - mong you, but be u - nit - ed in one mind.
 ways that are lov - ing, pre - serve the u - ni - ty of faith.
 not be con - ceit - ed, but look to oth - ers in their need.



For there is one Lord, one faith, one God of us all.
 For there is one Lord, one faith, one God of us all.
 For there is one Lord, one faith, one God of us all.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Brief intercessory prayers may be added at the end of the litany.

In peace let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, have mercy."

For the holy Church of God, that it may be filled with truth and love and be found without fault at the day of your coming, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For all who fear God and believe in you, Lord Christ, that our divisions may cease and that all may be one as you and the Father are one, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the mission of the Church, that in faithful witness it may preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those who do not yet believe and for those who have lost their faith, that they may receive the light of the gospel, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and forbearance may grow among nations and peoples, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer; for refugees, prisoners, and all who are in danger; that they may be relieved and protected, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this congregation, for those who are present, and for those who are absent, that we may be delivered from hardness of heart and show forth your glory in all we do, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For our enemies and those who wish us harm and for all whom we have injured or offended, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For ourselves, for the forgiveness of our sins, and for the grace of the Holy Spirit to amend our lives, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For all who have asked that we pray for them; for our families, friends, and neighbors; that being freed from anxiety, they may live in joy, peace, and health, we pray to you, Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

[For... *here name the person and the cause of the petition*, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.]

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves and one another and all our lives to Christ our God.

Amen.

PRAYER

Blessed Lord, you have given us your Holy Scriptures for our learning. May we so hear them, read, learn, and take them to heart that, being strengthened and comforted by your holy Word, we may cling to the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

“May the Peace of God”

Hymn 929

May the peace of God our heav’nly Father,
And the grace of Christ the risen Son,
And the fellowship of God the Spirit
Keep our hearts and minds within his love.

Refrain

And to him be praise for his glorious reign
From the depths of earth to the heights of heav’n.
We declare the name of the Lamb once slain -
Christ eternal, the King of kings.

May this peace which passes understanding,
And this grace which makes us what we are,
And this fellowship of his communion
Make us one in spirit and in heart. *Refrain*

OFFERING

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