

United in Christ

People often speak of wanting “unity.” I get it, I do.... How much *easier and better* would life be if we all were of one like-mind; if we were all of one heart; if we all had the same one unified plan and purpose, all united and pulling in the same direction? Politicians would be out of a job. Lawyers would be out of a job. Now, while that all sounds great, understand: you would struggle too. After all, you’d have nothing to complain about anymore, and for some folks, if they no longer had anything to complain about, they’d shrivel up and die. **Believe it or not: Not all unity is good.** Not all unity is something to be desired. Case in point: Consider Old Testament Israel. Less than two weeks out of Egyptian bondage, they took a unanimous vote to make and worship a golden calf. *They were absolutely united... but no one would say that their unity was a good thing.* What about what we see in the Old Testament lesson appointed for today—the Tower of Babel. On what or on whom was the mind/soul/heart of this nation affixed? Was that singular, united mind of the people fixed on God and His Word? Whose plan and will was the group united around and most concerned about: *Their plan/will or God’s plan/will?* We know the answer, don’t we?

Now, that’s a pretty bold accusation; to say that they weren’t concerned about God, His Word, His plan/will. *How judgmental!* I mean... all they’re really guilty of is undertaking a rather ambitious building project. *Well... not so fast.* If you know the timeframe and context of this event, you will know that these folks were direct descendants of Noah, living less than 150 years after Noah and his sons came off the ark. In fact, Noah and his sons were still very much alive! Noah lived a full 300 years after coming off the ark, and his three sons lived another 500 years after coming off the ark. They were all still very much alive when this was taking place! Now, if you’ll remember, God’s command to His people, already in the Garden of Eden, was to *be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.* This same exact command was given to Noah and his sons after they came off the Ark. “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.*” Folks: God wanted His people to *disperse*. Big Christians make little Christians. He made the whole world for them. He wanted them to go out into that great big world and fill it with His Gospel goodness and the corresponding faith and trust in that Gospel goodness.

This is where you can see the sin of the people in Babel coming into play. The fact that they were united in one language, one culture, and so on **wasn’t the problem.** The problem was the fact that they were united in their willful disobedience to God. They were united in their lack of faithfulness in God. *They were united in “our will/my will be done” and not “Thy will be done.”* The very fact that they tried to huddle up (so to speak) and do their own thing and *not disperse* (like God commanded) *proved* their sinful, fearful disobedience as well as their complete lack of faith and trust in their Lord.

You see, that's what the tower project was really all about. The tower was their way of showing that they were united in their desire to be in control. The tower was a monument to and symbol of their unified desire to usurp God and His authority/will. They didn't understand the fact that the very tower they were building bore witness against them and their sinfully self-centered and self-serving ways. It bore witness to the fact that as united as they were, they didn't have true unity where it mattered most—***faithful unity with their Lord God***. That tower confessed the fact that they had unity in their enmity against God.

And that's not an unwarranted accusation. Just listen to their own words. *"Let us make bricks. Let us build a city and make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."* Let us do this. Let us do that. I'm going to do this. I'm not going to do that. I don't care what anyone else says, I'm doing what I want to do. ***Ask yourself: Who was their god?*** I'm sure they'd give the "right answer" if you asked them, but what were their fruits confessing?

Isn't it funny how we can so easily recognize their sin, but we can't recognize the same sin staring back at us from the mirror? Look in the mirror. Who is/are your god(s)? I know you know the "right answer," but I didn't ask for the right answer. ***I asked for the honest answer; the Truth; the confession.*** Who is/are your god(s)? Whose plans, will, and timelines are you most concerned about? *"Father, not my will be done, but Your will be done."* You know... when Jesus prayed this (in the Garden of Gethsemane as He was sweating blood, knowing this [*the crucifix*] was in His immediate future), **He meant every word of it.** It wasn't lip-service, and He proved this by humbling Himself to His Father's will. Look to this cross. Here is the proof. *"Thy will be done..."* ***and it was... willingly and without so much as a hiccup of protest.*** Look at this cross. Here is the monumental fruit of His humble faithfulness. I wonder... when you pray, *"Thy will be done,"* what are the fruits that are borne out of your words? What do the actions you take ***after*** praying those words prove? Would the "monument" that is your faith look more like a cross, where it's all about God, or would your "monument of faith" look more like the Tower of Babel; a monument to the self?

Enough with all this. Let's take the focus off of us and our sin, and instead put the focus on the Good News that is God's response to all this self-centered, self-exalting foolishness. *"Come, let us go down and see this thing they are building."* ***He goes down... and then He confuses their language and scatters them. It's a "reverse-Pentecost," isn't it?*** One language is turned into many languages, and no one understands anything being said.

Okay... what's so good about that? Simple. God confused their language in order that His will would be done. That's not a heavy-handed, *"I'm going to bulldoze through and get My way, whether you like it or not!"* God's not like us. God desires the death of no one, right? He confused their language so that they

wouldn't cause more harm, to themselves or anyone else, for that matter. They were dispersed over the face of all the earth... just as He had intended all along. This confusing and dispersing was an act of love for His people and their salvation. With the false sense of sinful pride and security now rent asunder and done away with, the people—***all of them—had nothing and no one to rely on...no one except their heavenly Father.*** In a paradoxical, ironic kind of way, their splitting and dispersing did bring about unity. They were now united in sinful helplessness. More importantly, they were united in having to put their fear, love, and trust in God alone.

Look around. ***Look in the mirror.*** Whether you want to admit it or not, we are all united. We're all united with the people of Babel... yes, even you. We're all united, one to another. No... we may not all have the same likes, dislikes, and opinions. We see things differently. We do things differently. And yet... we're all united. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, right? ***"All" means EVERYONE... you, me, and everyone else.*** We are united in our sin, which means that we're also united in our need for a Savior.

And this is where that Gospel message of Pentecost, simply put into languages that ***everyone*** could plainly understand—***no one was left out***—comes bursting through! All are redeemed in the blood of Christ. ***God so loved the whole world....*** The sinful veil that once divided/separated us from our holy and righteous God has been rent asunder (by God's own hands, nonetheless), uniting us/restoring us to fellowship with our heavenly Father. In Christ, we have all been reconciled to our heavenly Father. ***How's that for unity?*** Christ died and rose again for your sins, for my sins, and for the sins of the entire world; even for the sins of those who still choose to arrogantly follow their own propositions, plans, and purposes. ***"It is finished"*** was spoken for them too.

Fix your eyes on the cross of Jesus. In a "reverse-Tower of Babel" kind of way, look at where your Lord God is calling you and gathering you in order to unite with you and with all His people. ***Our Lord comes down to us and unites with us around His lowly cross.***

But this Christ-centered, life-giving unity isn't just a "past-tense" thing that took place on a particular Friday so many centuries ago, is it? Look to the baptismal font, where your God and Lord first brought you into unity with Him and the communion of saints. It is here in the lowly and unassuming waters of Holy Baptism that the name we made for ourselves by virtue of our sinful human nature was ***mercifully erased*** as He put His own name upon our heads and our hearts, uniting us to Him and His death and resurrection. Look right here [the altar], where your Lord ***comes down and unites with us today*** in, with, and under these lowly elements of bread and wine. ***"As often as you do this, remember what I have said. This is My body. This is My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin."***

It is here at this lowly little table on this side of eternity that He not only unites Himself to us, but unites us with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. It is here that **all the saints** of the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church—saints of the Church Triumphant in heaven and saints of the Church Militant still fighting the good fight here on earth—***are all united... around Christ and in Christ.*** We, the communion of saints, are all united, one to another [*horizontal*], united in Christ [*vertical/cruciform*]. ***How's that for unity?***

And this unity ***means*** something too. This type of unity isn't something that can be prescribed, but only described. This Christ-centered unity produces ***genuine, authentic*** fruits of repentant joy. ***Nobody's faith is perfect, but genuine and authentic isn't the same as perfect.*** United in Christ, the genuine, authentically repentant child of God won't be out to make a name for his/her self. They're not out to get their way. ***Their only concern is Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. "Thy will be done."*** They pray it, **they mean it**, and they try to put it into practice every second of every day. "*Whoever loves Me will keep My Word.*" They're not content with "part-time unity," as if they can be united to Christ when it's convenient; when it works for them, but they'll do their own thing and just ask for repentance ***when "My will" becomes the most important thing.*** **NO!** Unity in Christ is what they desire ***every second of every day!*** (*Can you imagine if Jesus only united to us when it was convenient for Him or beneficial to Him? Lord, have mercy!*) The faith of the authentic child of God, though not perfect, ***is genuine, built firmly on the Rock that is Christ and His cross.*** Built on Christ, the entire life of the authentic child of God is a living monument of humble repentance and **authentic, Christ-centered joy.** ***Soli Deo Gloria! Latin for: To God alone be all the glory!*** I pray that this saintly, Christ-centered unity is your genuine, authentic reality, not just when it suits you, but now and to the end of the age and to all eternity.

AMEN