

Message: They Will Be One

What happens when a child falls down and scrapes a knee?

You know. You’ve all been children. We go to someone with our hurt. They listen to us, wipe our tears away and take care of us. Taking care of our scrape was a good thing, though I remember dreading part of it. After carefully wiping my knee clean, Mom or Dad would usually put iodine on it. And that stung!

After that came my favorite part, a bandage. Usually there was some antibiotic ointment applied to the sterile gauze pad, then the bandage was put on. After a hug or kiss, we usually got a treat or special treatment. A couple of days later there was a bandage removal process. Once that was done, it was easy to see how far the healing had gone. Today bandages come in all sorts of fun shapes and colors.

Even though we had been hurt, all was right with the world.

Life was back in balance. The world was in harmony.

Don’t you wish all of the problems of the world could be solved so readily and easily? Unfortunately, we know that’s not the case. Many injuries and hurts can’t be solved by a simple bandage. Intensive care may be needed. Even that isn’t enough sometimes.

Physical injury is one concern, but mental, emotional and spiritual harm are a whole other concern. The wounds we carry inside aren’t obvious or easily visible. Treatment can be as simple as a hug and kiss and as intensive and complex as any procedure. You can’t remove a bandage and see the healing from emotional abuse. Deep listening over time is often required.

I’m talking about harm because it reflects the negative side of life.

The first rule of living as Methodists is “do no harm,” yet it seems like that’s all we’re doing to one another right now. When you look at our denomination, we see hurt and injury. When you look at the history of Corona UMC, we see hurt and injury. When you look at the families of our congregation and in our community, we see hurt and injury. Politically, we’re divided. Economically, we’re further apart than ever before. We harm those seeking asylum and justify it as right and good.

The world is a harsh place, filled with injustice but it doesn’t have to be. God made us and God made the world to be good. Jesus sends us into the world to show others another way to live, the way of peace, love ... and unity.

How does that impact us as we try to follow Jesus? Our scripture for today, John 17:20-26, is challenging and yet it gives hope. Jesus prayed for us – the believers who came afterward. Jesus prayed that we would believe in God and that “*we will be made perfectly one*” in heart and mind (v23). The power to live in unity comes from God. Jesus prayed we would be mature in our oneness. We aren’t children looking for a bandage. We’re adults, fully aware, who are working hard to live in unity. We’re seeking to love like Jesus.

When we’re in unity, other people take notice. That’s because real, effective harmony is difficult. If it was easy, we’d see it all the time. When we show others that we can work through the injuries that we do to each others, people take notice. When we show others that we’re willing to do the deep, intensive work it takes to come together as a complex group of unrelated persons, people ask questions. When we show others that the way we do so is by relying on God’s love, grace and mercy, people want to know about Jesus. We can live in unity like an island of harmony in an ocean of uncertainty.

That leads to the question: what is unity? Google says unity means we’re “joined as a complete and pleasing whole. We have sameness, coherence, integrity and congruence. We act together with the same identity” – followers of Christ. Unity and complexity aren’t opposites. It’s possible for different people and groups to relate and work together in unity.

One way of saying this is “many voices, but one message.”¹

Without this kind of unity, a group is on the path to failure. Harmony is a synonym of unity. Google tells us that when we’re in harmony with each other, there’s solidarity, rapport, peace and cooperation. There’s balance in a consistent, pleasing whole. There’s a blending of our

¹ <https://www.terrapiadventures.com/blog/what-makes-a-good-team-part-two-unity/>

narratives in a continuous narrative. For us, as followers of Christ, that means that our stories are part of Jesus’ story.

Intent is needed for us to be together in unity. Living in harmony is like peace making. It goes against our tendency to fight or flee. That’s needed because there is no perfect church. There is no perfect group. But there is a recipe for success – many groups and teams are effective. Unity is important when you put a group of unrelated individuals together and expect them to work together to make disciples.

According to the firm Talent Management, 86% of employees blame lack of collaboration for failure.² It’s up to us to develop unity, encourage collaboration and ensure we work together and not against one another. American poet Mattie Stepanek said,

“Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.”³

Teamwork and collaboration require communication.

We must listen to each other. Then we need to ask ourselves difficult questions and, as mature adults and believers, be willing to go beyond simple answers. We have to speak up with love, even when everyone else prefers not to deal with the anger, frustration, hurt, disappointment and anxiety that may be inherent in a situation. Jay Weatherill says,

“You don’t get unity by ignoring questions that have to be faced”⁴

When we’re part of a whole, with the same identity and intent, good things happen. God blesses us. We’re open to the way the Spirit is moving in the lives of the people we meet, particularly those outside the walls of this building. When we seek unity with others, looking for the presence of God in them, we’re honoring God. When we’re in unity together, we’re in unity with God. That’s one of the ways God marks us so others know who we are.

The flipside is to lean toward being divisive and self-centered.

When we live that way, we’re more concerned with getting our own way than being together. We may stir things up to distract others or over-emphasize our role. That’s how negative influence works.

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

Do you have a tendency toward conflict? Here’s a simple test that may help you do a self-assessment:

- “Right now, are you engaged in a “hot” or “cold” war with anybody?
- How often do you argue with others? Do you raise your voice?
- Do you tell stories about others that they would prefer not to be spread around?
- Do you ever make up (or exaggerate) stories to put others in a bad light?
- Is it more important to get people on your side than it is to help reach agreement within a group?
- Do you take delight in pointing out the faults of others?
- Do you condemn the faithlessness or morality of others?
- Do you have a reputation as someone who is hard to get along with?”⁵

If you find yourself answering “yes” to several of these questions, perhaps it’s time to take make some changes in your life.

Divisiveness isn’t just a personal problem. It’s a spiritual problem.

It inhibits the unity of the group. Divisiveness limits our ability to bear spiritual fruit. Think about that for a minute. If you’re a person who is always finding fault with others, rather than showing mercy and compassion, what are you telling others? I’m not sure that the love you feel is expressed in an authentic or believable way. Complaining and joy rarely go together.

I’m not talking about being perfect, where we never say anything wrong. That’s unrealistic. But if you’re a bucket dipper – taking energy and life away from others, more often than you’re a bucket filler – giving life and energy to others, then it’s hard for anyone to hear the good news you have to share about Jesus.

What can we do to develop unity? First, we need to revisit our view of God. Maybe you’re struggling with a view of a God-who-doesn’t-care or a God-who-you-can’t-please or a God-who-punishes? Paul wrote this to the congregation in Thessalonica, “*We ask you - urge is more like it - that you keep on doing what we told you to do to please God, not in a*

⁵ <https://biblicalcounselinginsights.com/attitudes-and-behaviors/divisiveness-vs-harmony/#.XPAIgPkrL4Y>

dogged religious plod, but in a living, spirited dance” (1 Thessalonians 4:2, MSG).

Jesus said, *“I’m praying ... for those who will believe in me The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind - just as you, [O God], are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me.”*

When we live that way, Jesus tells us we’ll bear spiritual fruit: *“They’ll be mature in this oneness, and give the godless world evidence that you’ve sent me and loved them in the same way you’ve loved me” (John 17:20-23, MSG).* Embrace God’s love – it gives life!

Second, we need to show others mercy. Paul said, *“Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love” (Ephesians 4:2).*

Next, admit to ourselves and to God that we’re a person of conflict. Ask for God to change us and give us a new heart, a heart of peace. Once you’ve gone to God, go to those you’ve harmed and apologize. Ask for forgiveness. Restitution may be needed, if appropriate. There are ramifications and it will take time to rebuild trust.

Finally, we can’t be naïve about divisiveness. Lies come easy to those who have a history and pattern of conflict. We have to be on guard spiritually against the temptation to re-enter into conflict. Conflict is one of the ways we get what we want. We like to be in control. We want things to be our way. It takes time to change, to learn new habits, putting others first. Keep at it. If you know others who have, or are battling, with conflict or anger, perhaps you could meet one-on-one or in a group to help each other and hold each other accountable. We need to build in some safeguards. Having someone you can talk to is good.

Let’s hold onto God’s promises. Prayer is very helpful. The psalmist wrote, *“How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along! ... [Harmony] is like the dew on Mount Hermon flowing down the slopes of Zion. Yes, that’s where GOD commands the blessing, ordains eternal life” (Psalm 133, MSG).*

We have good intent. You are good people. There isn’t a person here who doesn’t want what’s best for the church, our community and your

family. You and I have to embrace the reality that our relationships are more important than any single issue we face. We can't make it on our own. We can't make disciples on our own, either. We need each other to be effective.

One last word: expect to live in harmony. Every day is a new day. Even if you slip into conflict or old patterns of behavior now and then, you can become a peacemaker with the help of Christ. That's the prayer Jesus prayed for you. It's the way to a life of oneness, wholeness and unity. Let's honor God in all we do together.

When we do, we'll experience amazing blessings, just as Paul and Silas did. A conflict in the market led to arrest, beating, flogging and imprisonment. That led to singing songs in jail at midnight, giving glory to God. God responded. The earth shook, the doors open. Rather than escaping, the two spoke words of life to the jailer.

The result: a family was saved and baptized. They, in turn, cared for Paul and Silas. God works in mysterious ways. Trust in God. Love each other. Put aside the need to be right or in control and join in making this congregation a unified whole, known as true believers in Jesus who practice what we preach. Sounds like a good life to me....

Let us pray ...

Lord, thank you for your prayers and the honor and glory you give to us through your love and grace. Forgive us when we seek to influence or manipulate others to accomplish our will, rather than yours. Give us a new identity. May we be known as your children, authentic in all we say, think and do. That path isn't easy, but you mark us as your own and give us the grace and love to improve and become new beings. May we embrace our oneness with you in such a way that others see and believe in you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

John 17:20-26 (CEB)

“I’m not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word. I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me. I’ve given them the glory that you gave me so that they can be one just as we are one. I’m in them and you are in me so that they will be made perfectly one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you have loved them just as you loved me.

Father, I want those you gave me to be with me where I am. Then they can see my glory, which you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Righteous Father, even the world didn’t know you, but I’ve known you, and these believers know that you sent me. I’ve made your name known to them and will continue to make it known so that your love for me will be in them, and I myself will be in them.”

Acts 16:16-34 (CEB)

One day, when we were on the way to the place for prayer, we met a slave woman. She had a spirit that enabled her to predict the future. She made a lot of money for her owners through fortune-telling. She began following Paul and us, shouting, “These people are servants of the Most High God! They are proclaiming a way of salvation to you!” She did this for many days.

This annoyed Paul so much that he finally turned and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to leave her!” It left her at that very moment.

Her owners realized that their hope for making money was gone. They grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the officials in the city center. When her owners approached the legal authorities, they said, “These people are causing an uproar in our city. They are Jews who promote customs that we Romans can’t accept or practice.” The crowd joined in the attacks against Paul and Silas, so the authorities ordered that they be stripped of their clothes and beaten with a rod. When Paul and Silas had been severely beaten, the authorities threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to secure them with great care. When he

received these instructions, he threw them into the innermost cell and secured their feet in stocks.

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. All at once there was such a violent earthquake that it shook the prison’s foundations. The doors flew open and everyone’s chains came loose. When the jailer awoke and saw the open doors of the prison, he thought the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul shouted loudly, “Don’t harm yourself! We’re all here!”

The jailer called for some lights, rushed in, and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He led them outside and asked, “Honorable masters, what must I do to be rescued?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your entire household.” They spoke the Lord’s word to him and everyone else in his house. Right then, in the middle of the night, the jailer welcomed them and washed their wounds. He and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his home and gave them a meal. He was overjoyed because he and everyone in his household had come to believe in God.