

I.N.I.

Nineteenth Sunday in Pentecost
October 20, 2019
Ephesians 4:7-16

In Christ Jesus, who is the Head of the Church, His body, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Have you ever closely examined the money you carry around in your pocket? On every coin there is a Latin phrase "E pluribus unum." *E pluribus unum* was one of the first [national mottos](#) of the [United States of America](#). Translated from the [Latin](#), it means "Out of many, one." It referred to the integration of the [13 independent colonies](#) into one united country. This one motto also has thirteen letters. The motto was selected by the first [Great Seal](#) committee in [1776](#), at the beginning of the [American Revolution](#). Today it takes on an additional meaning, given the pluralistic nature of our diversified American society from immigration. You can find out more information about this motto on the back page of this morning's bulletin.

In our sermon text for this morning the Lord through the Apostle Paul does not use that Latin term but He does also speak of many becoming one. The many=all the believers in Christ. The one=the body of Christ with Christ as the Head. And so our theme for this morning is this:

E PLURIBUS UNUM: OUT OF MANY, ONE!

I: WE ARE MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE WITH MANY DIFFERENT GIFTS, YET WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST.

Even though we are all human beings we are all different. Different in our personalities, in our abilities, in our habits, in our looks, in our shapes and sizes, in our sporting teams we like and dislike. And yet all of us who have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ are one. One family, one body! Paul writes in our first verse: **BUT TO EACH ONE OF US GRACE WAS GIVEN ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE OF CHRIST'S GIFT.**

Each one of us has received a "gift of grace" from Christ. The first and greatest gift of grace was the gift of forgiveness of sins. Did we need this gift? Need we even ask? We who are many are also one in sin. We **ALL** were conceived and born in sin. Because of sin we **ALL** were Satan's captives, headed for a future cell in hell. We **ALL** have a heart filled with sin that shows itself in our sinful words and actions toward each other and which we privately see in our sinful thoughts. Because of sin we **ALL** deserved God's condemnation and an eternal separation from Him.

But Jesus has earned for **ALL** of us forgiveness for **ALL** of our sins. He has washed our hearts clean, set us free from Satan's captivity, and made us one with our Heavenly Father.

We can be sure of this because of another great gift of grace we have been given---the gift of faith. Being made members of Jesus' body through faith in Him, is solely by God's grace, not by any merit or worthiness on our part. Jesus did the work of redeeming us by His perfect life, atoning sacrifice and resurrection from the dead and then He sent the Holy Spirit who did the work of converting and sanctifying us by means of the Gospel.

We are told in our text that it is Christ who determines which gifts a believer is to receive. They are given **ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE OF CHRIST'S GIFT**. No one is overlooked. This grace in Christ is given to each of us. That is so very important for us to realize. Every ability and every talent you have, has been given to you as a gift, not earned by you. We may hone our talents, work at our abilities, but the possessing of them was Christ's gift to us. Realizing that should eliminate all pride or boasting on our part. It should keep us from becoming conceited about our abilities and keep us from looking down upon others whose abilities do not match our own. It should also teach us not to murmur and complain because we think our abilities or talents are inferior to others.

Paul tells us that when Christ ascended on high, He led captivity captive. That is, He took Satan, who had captured and made captive all of mankind---all of us were in his grip of sin and death---and made Him captive. Jesus foretold this in John 12:31 **"NOW IS THE JUDGMENT OF THIS WORLD; NOW THE RULER OF THIS WORLD WILL BE CAST OUT."** In Colossians 2:15 Paul writes, **HAVING**

DISARMED PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS, HE MADE A PUBLIC SPECTACLE OF THEM, TRIUMPHING OVER THEM BY THE CROSS. He descended into hell to proclaim His ultimate victory over Satan. Jesus lives, the victory's won! His suffering, death and resurrection fulfilled the first prophecy in Genesis 3:15—He crushed Satan's head.

The individual abilities, characteristics and qualities that we believers possess have been given to us by Christ through the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in I Cor. 12: **THERE ARE DIVERSITIES OF GIFTS, BUT THE SAME SPIRIT. THERE ARE DIFFERENCES OF MINISTRIES, BUT THE SAME LORD. AND THERE ARE DIVERSITIES OF ACTIVITIES, BUT IT IS THE SAME GOD WHO WORKS ALL IN ALL. BUT THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT IS GIVEN TO EACH ONE FOR THE PROFIT OF ALL:**

The gifts that Christ has given to His Church that Paul mentions in our text are the gifts of **APOSTLES, PROPHETS, EVANGELISTS, PASTORS AND TEACHERS.**

The Ascended Savior never gave gifts just for the sake of giving. They were and are always given for a purpose. And that is our second point this morning:

II: AS MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE WITH MANY DIFFERENT GIFTS WE WORK FOR ONE PURPOSE—BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST.

In our text Paul is speaking of the gift of church leaders. They have been given as gifts to the Church, not so they can obtain honor, power, prestige and glory for themselves, but in order to serve others. They are to serve the members by training them, teaching them, preparing them for the work of ministry, for service to others as well. What a grand plan of our Lord. "I will give these gifts of called workers to my body to serve others by training them to serve even more others." In doing this the body of Christ is built up.

Pity the poor congregation that has a pastor who neglects this work--who feels he must do it all--who does not take the time to instruct others and equip them for this service to the body of Christ or who does not allow others to get involved in this service--who looks upon the ministry as "His ministry" and "His church," and does not train and encourage the members to use their gifts and talents.

Pity also the poor pastor who is willing to train and encourage the members but has a congregation that is not willing to help in service to the Lord and expects the pastor to do it all--who come and sit in the pews on a Sunday morning and go home and then wonder why the church does not grow, why the Word is not getting out and why things don't get done.

God's plan is perfect. The pastors and teachers train the members and together they serve one another and also those outside of the church. Each believer will function in keeping with the measure of grace Christ has given him. This speaks to the individual. To each of you. To every single one of you. It doesn't mean you need an elaborate organizational set up. Members who have learned Scriptural principles and the eternal truths of God's Word from their spiritual leaders will be alert and watchful for opportunities to serve and make the most of their gifts.

The growth that has come in this congregation and the ones that I have served over the years not come from me beating the bushes and knocking on doors, but it has come from individual members doing the ground work, doing the evangelizing, doing the inviting. You are the ones who meet and work with far more unbelievers than I do. Most of my time is spent working with you, the members, and also instructing those who are interested. If I meet two or three people who do not know Jesus during the week, that is a lot. Now if every one of you meets only 2, 3, or 4 people every week and you speak to them about their Savior that means at least a hundred or more are being contacted.

How do we build up the body of Christ? By the Means of Grace. The Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Paul mentions a three-fold purpose or goal here:

- 1) *That we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.*
- 2) *That we come to a perfect man.*
- 3) *That we all come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

That is why we have Bible Study. That is why we emphasize doctrine. So that we have a full knowledge of and agreement upon the truths of the Christian faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. This takes time and effort. Time spent in the Word. Jesus said **SEARCH (ransack) THE SCRIPTURES, FOR IN THEM YOU THINK YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE; AND THESE ARE THEY WHICH TESTIFY OF ME.**

The second goal is to come to a perfect man—literally this means a complete person, one who has reached the goal. We need to hear, study and read the Word of God until our dying day. Until that goal of eternal life in heaven is reached, we still have much work to do.

The third goal is to come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This means spiritual maturity. And what is Christian, spiritual maturity?

In the next verse Paul tells us first what it is not. We read: **THAT WE SHOULD NO LONGER BE CHILDREN, TOSSED TO AND FRO AND CARRIED ABOUT WITH EVERY WIND OF DOCTRINE, BY THE TRICKERY OF MEN, IN THE CUNNING CRAFTINESS OF DECEITFUL PLOTTING.** Paul heaps up one term after another to describe the characteristics of those who are spiritually childlike or immature. They are like waves tossed about by the wind, like boats buffeted back and forth by the shifting wind. One teaching comes and that sounds good. Another teaching comes and that too sounds good. It is what we see today with all of the liberal biblical thinking and historical critical analysis that is accepted by so many church bodies. The common belief that no one has the truth, that every church and every religion has some good things to say and teach and we should accept all beliefs is Satan's deception of the modern age.

Paul says that is like a dishonest man who plays with loaded dice cheating his opponent, so that these false teachers make others believe that what they say and teach is the honest truth from God when it is not. Paul says they know all the tricks. Their aim is to employ schemes to practice deception. They lay out a path of human logic and sophistry that sounds so good and appears to be true but it leads away from the truth and is full of lies. It is easy for the false teacher to deceive those who are like children spiritually. Therefore we need to serve one another by helping each other to become spiritually mature in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.

Paul now tells us what Christian, spiritual maturity is. It is **SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE, GROWING UP IN ALL THINGS INTO HIM WHO IS THE HEAD -- CHRIST --**

This is how we help one another grow toward spiritual maturity—we tell one another the truth of God's Word. But we do it in love! Because of our sinful human nature we are tempted to project the image of superiority or to be impatient when we share the truth with others. Do we defend the Word at the expense of showing love to others? Or do we compromise the Word because we feel love enjoins us to do this? One man wrote, **"The Gospel truth is never unaccompanied by love. We hear of some people who are 'all truth and no love,' but in fact people without love cannot be 'all truth,' any more than people without a concern for truth can be 'all love' in any serious sense of the term. 'Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, and something of the same balance between these qualities should characterize His followers too."**

In doing this we grow up into Christ who is the Head. Do you know that a baby's head is the largest part of his body when he is born? As his body develops he is really growing up more and more into a right proportion to his head. Whether Paul had that thought in mind or not, it serves as a very good illustration of what he meant. It is by growing up into the Head, which is Christ that the believer comes to spiritual maturity.

Paul continues with this picture of the body in verse 16: **FROM WHOM THE WHOLE BODY, JOINED AND KNIT TOGETHER BY WHAT EVERY JOINT SUPPLIES, ACCORDING TO THE EFFECTIVE WORKING BY WHICH EVERY PART DOES ITS SHARE, CAUSES GROWTH OF THE BODY FOR THE EDIFYING OF ITSELF IN LOVE.**

A few years ago we viewed a DVD entitled "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made." In that DVD Dr. Menton showed how marvelously and intricately a little baby is woven and knit together in the mother's womb--not by chance, not by an evolutionary process, but by the hand of God. Just look at your bodies. You and I are composed of so many different parts: muscle, bones, organs, glands, nerves, skin, hair, molecules, etc. We have veins and arteries, tendons and tissue, eyes and ears and they all work together with each other taking orders from the brain. Only an all knowing, all powerful God could have designed such a marvelous body where everything works in concert with each other--the digestive system, the blood flowing through the veins and arteries, the nervous system, the lungs, the brain sending out signals, the eyes and the ears functioning. These all work together to make ME, a human being who can function and live on its own.

So also only an all knowing, all powerful God could have designed such a marvelous spiritual body

where everything works in concert with each other as we each do our share in proclaiming the Gospel message of peace and forgiveness in Christ Jesus and show loving concern for each other.

We are all to be in the “body-building” business. Building up the body of Christ, by working together in proclaiming the Gospel message in love to one another and to those whom we know and meet. As we know when something breaks down in our bodies, when there is a blockage in the system, or a disease is cruising through our bodies, or a stroke occurs so that parts do not work, the whole body does not function very well and sometimes even fights against itself. The same can happen to the body of Christ—the believers. It can become sick or diseased with false teaching. There can be a blockage or breakdown because of apathy. Infighting can take place because of personality conflicts or egos being hurt. Applying the Word in love is the only antidote and serum that can keep the body healthy and strong.

In conclusion we see how important unity of doctrine is for preserving the oneness the Spirit has worked in the Church. Each believer, every one of you has his or her own role in promoting this unity of faith and growth in the knowledge of Christ. Not all of you are equipped to perform the same function, but all of you are needed. No one is to be so humble that he thinks the church can get along very well without him. And no one is to consider himself so superior as to imagine that without him the church would fall apart.

You have been given this gift of grace as a gift to equip you, to prepare you to perform the functions of the church, of the body to which you belong. Teaching the Word and spreading the Word to others, building up the body of Christ is our top priority. But we need to be on the look out for the false teachings that are all around us so that the body of Christ does not become infected and diseased.

What a beautiful picture the Lord through Paul draws for us here-many in one body, united, concerned, and growing. To be brought into this body and then be permitted to do our part in helping this body grow is a great privilege and profound evidence of our Lord’s amazing grace and that should humbly move all of us to declare;

“Lord, here am I, use me!”

Amen