

## **Unity in Mission**

**Ephesians 4:1-6**

**By Jonathan Eide**

Good evening. Please open to Ephesians 4, verses 1 through 6. Let's pray.

Lord, open Your Word to us. Help us believe and help us in our unbelief. Help us believe that You will establish the church and help us believe that Your church will be united, united in You, united in fact because of You. We thank You for these promises. We pray for belief in them. We pray that as we open the Scripture tonight that You would open it to my heart and our hearts. Help us understand the unity that we have in You. We pray this in Your name, amen.

I've been pleasantly surprised today that I think I have spoken more Russian than English today. I had no idea there were so many Russian speakers in Jackson and at First Pres. but that's a compliment; it's a wonderful thing. I've also been impressed and pleased at how both educated and concerned the people I've talked to are about the situation in Russia and I would say about the church globally, in general. That's a wonderful and a beautiful thing and a great compliment that I give to you. It is our duty as believers to care about, and we're going to talk about that now, to care about and in fact be educated about what's happening to believers around the world in Ukraine and in other places as well. So thank you for that and for your Russian speakers. It was fun.

Let's read Ephesians 4 verses 1 through 6:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager 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 that belongs to your call - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Amen. Amen.

This, in my mind, is a logical next step after our discussion, after my sermon this morning on the church. This morning we talked from 1 Corinthians 12 about how the fact that we are baptized into one body, that we are given to be in one body,

and that given is in fact that we are made to drink of that Spirit it says in 1 Corinthians 12:3, that we are united in that process, that the Lord has taken us from unbelief to belief and in fact in that process united us with others who believed. We referenced Romans 6 where it talks about the fact that we are united with Him in baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we may walk in this newness of life and we may walk together in this newness of life and that promise of the church that is given us. This, in my mind, is the sister passage. Now that we have that promise of the church, now that that has been established or hopefully beginning to be established in our lives and in our minds, what does that unity look like for us.

So let's start looking with this passage from verse 6 working our way backwards through the passage about what that unity looks like. We start with the body and the Spirit we referred to this morning. This is the connection back to our baptism, back to the church, and back to our establishment with Christ. Verse 6 establishes the basis of this unity that we have - "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." This is the main argument. This is the basis of our unity. This is from whence comes our ability to be able to be united with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We understand that. And then it works backwards from there and once we have that basis we can get to verses 2 and 3. "One Lord," verse 5, "one faith, one baptism." Verse 4, "There is one body and one Spirit - just as you recalled to one hope that belongs to your call." Calvin says, "By the spirit of sanctification God spreads Himself through all the members of the church, embraces all in His government, and dwells in all. But God is not inconsistent with Himself and therefore we cannot be united to Him but in one body." This is that spiritual unity that we have and that spiritual unity is based only on the fact that the Spirit is working that unity in us. He's gathering and perfecting His saints and He is our one hope, our one Lord, and our one faith, and our one baptism.

In many places, and Ukraine as well, there is an "us" and "them" that develops. This is unfortunately a product of the Fall, a natural result of the Fall that we have that there naturally is sometimes an "us" and a "them" that develops on any topic, on an event, on anything. And Ukraine, right now for us, that "us" and "them" looks like a division on ethnic lines. I mentioned I was impressed with the Russian speakers here at the church and I certainly was. My second language is Russian and I speak a little bit of Ukrainian as well but because we went to Ukraine in 1998 as I mentioned we learned Russian, which was the language to learn at the time. If we were to arrive in Ukraine today we would probably learn Ukrainian because the language landscape is changing across that country. But the conflict that is in Ukraine right now is in fact producing some of this "us" and "them" in Ukraine and those three things fall along three lines, I think, in Ukraine. And how the Ukrainian church has dealt with that "us" and "them," how they have established themselves on the basis that is given here in verses 3 through 6 - 4, 5, and 6 - that there is one body, is on one hand tragic and on the other hand beautiful, and we'll look at both sides of that. And how it's working out, how

verses 2 and 3 are working out in that church as well and what that example looks like for us.

The three divisions that unfortunately have developed and two of them just in the past year in Ukraine, the “us-es” and “them-s” which come to the church’s doorstep as well, don’t they, are language, politics, and economics. These three things, again in the past year, have kind of defined what the Ukrainian church is, how they interact with one another and how they’re able to - these are obstacles toward loving their brothers and sisters and being united in the church. Right now in Ukraine because of the language there is a divide between Ukrainian speakers and Russian speakers and that divide isn’t just, “I prefer one language or I prefer the other language.” That divide is connected to a political divide so that now in our churches, in our denomination - and this morning I brought greetings from the Ukrainian Evangelical Presbyterian Church the language that the church uses to hold their services, the language that they preach and sing in, now becomes all of a sudden a political statement because you’re either for Ukraine or you’re for Russia and there is no space in between those two things. So some of our churches are asking - in fact I called one of our pastors recently and asked him, “How is the division working in your church?” This is the church I mentioned this morning that’s about a hundred miles away from the conflict zone. And he said, “In our church we have basically three sections, three thirds of people in our church - a third of the people are sympathetic to Russia and sympathetic to the insurgency and sympathetic to what may come their way if the front lines and if in the end Russia takes over their city. A third of the people are vehemently against that. A third of the people would hate for that to happen, would lean more Europe and speak Ukrainian. And a third of the people could care less as long as they have food on the table,” he said.

So how does a pastor in that context in that church lead the people in Ephesians 4? What does unity look like for that people? Is our allegiance to the Gospel, is our understanding that we are one in Spirit stronger than our understanding that we are one or many are divided nationally by politics? It’s like a division that we’re seeing in the country is the division in politics. It’s a situation that is developing, has developed and is developing across the country where you have to make a choice. You can’t stay neutral, unfortunately, in the current political landscape in Ukraine. You have to say, “I’m either for this or for that” and you’re usually not 10% or 20% for it. You have to be 100% for it, that the other side is completely wrong and this is completely right and any time we know that makes its way into the church we develop that “us” and “them” as well. So politics has unfortunately made its way into the church as well. How does a pastor lead through that?

Economics as well. Right now in Ukraine the currency has lost about 200% of its value over the past eight to twelve months and it’s continuing to fall. It is a desperate economic situation and even economically there has developed an “us” and a “them.” “Is this unity,” we ask ourselves in Christ, “stronger than the

division that is outside of the church in language, in politics, or in economics?”

Let's go back with me, if you will, to the first three verses. "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The basis that we talked about this morning, the Spirit working out itself in us and in our church causing us to drink from 1 Corinthians 12 is what allows us, is what enables us to be even to think about how we do verses 1 through 3. These "us" and "thems" naturally fall into any church. I don't presume to know what the "uses" and "thems" are or how many of them there are in this church or in any church but we understand that division does make its way into the church.

How the church in Ukraine has dealt with and is dealing with these I think can be a wonderful example to us. Let's read again verse 2. "With all humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in love." There is an understanding that we are all debtors, that we all come to the cross the same. We read this morning that we are all caused to drink of the Spirit. It isn't any one of us that is more able than another to be able to believe this good news that has been given to us and a deep understanding of that allows us to, at least when we walk through the doors of the church, at least when we consider ourselves members of the body of Christ, to be able to do away with the divisions that would separate us, the divisions of language, and I have seen examples in Ukraine of people selflessly speaking the other person's language even when it's not their preference in order to show their love for them. The division in politics - again, this is such a black and white issue and such a divisive and so much hatred has developed because of this Russian-Ukrainian issue and what's happened with Crimea and what's happening in eastern Ukraine. But yet we see, and against all odds so to speak or at least against what is ordinary, churches in the western part of the country receiving refugees from the eastern part of the country.

The Good Samaritan story is amazing because he was good when he shouldn't have been and Jesus says this is what your neighbor is. And the church in Ukraine has shown that what should happen, the enmity that should exist, the hatred that should be there for the people on the other side, in this case literally on the other side of the river, on the other side of the country, on the other side of the language gap or the language barrier, the enmity that should exist toward those people doesn't exist because we have a different identity, because we have a different citizenship. The question of patriotism and citizenship has been talked about for hours and hours and hours and written about some in Ukraine now because that is what we're dealing with. That is the question for Ukrainians. "Who am I a patriot to? What am I a citizen of?" And for some people in Ukraine, literally they are a citizen of no place. For some, in fact millions of people, they have no citizenship functionally.

So where does that drive us? Where does that drive them? It drives them to a desire, a longing for something else. "There's got to be something higher than this. There's got to be some kind of something that I can attach myself to." And that attachment comes not in a paper passport with a blue or a red or a yellow cover. That attachment comes for us in the church in the body of Christ. And in the economic sphere we're seeing examples of Ukraine, because it's difficult for many outside Ukraine to understand where the suffering is, how to help in what situations, how to load a container full of clothes and send it to whom, what would I do even if I wanted to help? Ukrainians get it. They know whose suffering. They hear it on the news every day. They're living this and they're reading, obviously because they're very invested in this, they're reading everything about this and they know who to help. And what we're seeing is churches helping churches, neither of which who have anything, and sending help to the places and the churches and to the people in need even in the eastern part of the country. This division that should exist does not because somehow, and I say somehow because I'm amazed at how it's happening, amazed not how it's happening but amazed at how God is doing this in Ukraine, this foundation in the church He is building, He is setting in place. And this humility that's spoken of in verse 2, this gentleness that's spoken of in verse 2, this patience that's spoken of in verse 2, this bearing with one another in love eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit even when almost all Ukrainians are not eager to maintain the unity of their country, there is a sense to which the body of Christ is maintaining that unity in a beautiful way, and in a way that I stand in awe of and I think that we in the West can learn a lot from.

I said to someone recently I think that a believer should have two sources of the news. We should have the media, whatever news outlet you read or listen to or watch, and our other source of news because we are members of this body of Christ, because we have this unity with others around the world, has to be our brothers and sisters in Christ, doesn't it? We have to be understanding that - and again, this is what I complimented many of you for, for what I've heard from many of you - the level of education and the level of interest and the level of desire to know and help the situation in Ukraine is a beautiful thing and that's what we should have as believers, shouldn't it? One source of the news is what we read in the media; the other source is what we hear from our brothers and sisters in Christ. And often those who aren't the same, are they? Often those two are in fact very different. We hear about floods in India from our brothers and sisters in Christ in India. We hear about tragedies in different parts of the world that we may hear on the news or we may not hear on the news but we care because these people we're connected with somehow. And that somehow is that we're united with them and baptized into the same Spirit with them.

And this is our part of the mission we understand. Ukrainians are struggling, Ukrainians are suffering, and Ukrainians are brought to tears when they hear that the church in the West cares. Not that there's containers full of food or clothing or money on the way - that's helpful. If it's in the right places at the right time it's

greatly appreciated and greatly interested but Ukrainians love when the Western church or the church in general cares, when they feel that there is that unity that exists, when they feel that there is something other than just them on this world. Because politically, there is that sense in Ukraine - "This is it. Nobody's coming to help us. We don't have any country on a white horse coming to rescue us from this situation politically but spiritually we do. Spiritually we have brothers and sisters all around the world who care, who are interested." Obviously I said this morning I'm interested, borderline obsessing on the situation in Ukraine. This is true for all countries in the world. Ukrainians have to learn and have to desire to know what's happening in Syria and Syrians in Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia - the list goes on obviously. We are members of this. This calling, this one body, one Spirit, verse 4 that you are called to, the hope that belongs to you - one Lord, one faith, one baptism - this isn't one based on your country, this isn't one based on your county, this isn't one based on your district or your state. This is one globally. This is His Church that He is building worldwide.

And this is why that unity projects two ways. It projects to the body of Christ around the world when there is interest, when there is love, when there is caring that in that interest projects to people outside the body of Christ too, doesn't it? This is the beautiful thing we're seeing in Ukraine. The 90s were a period of great openness in the former Soviet Union. The 2000s were a period of Ukraine closing to the Gospel. Now we're seeing people saying, "Wait a minute. There's something different about you guys. You're not despairing like the rest of us. What do you have that we don't have? We are in despair. There's great tragedy that has already happened and probably more is on the way for many people in many parts of Ukraine but the church is not despairing. There's a unity. You have something else out of this. Do you have some kind of different citizenship? Do you have some kind of different connection that we don't have?" And that is, and I think, the best years of Ukraine's ministry are ahead of it because just like a person, a broken country seeks God as does a person. Ukraine is broken right now and it's in a process of seeking, who better to tell them than the people that have a citizenship, the people that have an identity, the people that have a connection to this one body and one Spirit and this hope, as it says, belongs to your call. There is hope in the Gospel, there is hope in the body of Christ, and outside of which there is not hope. And Ukraine right now, as in many other troubled places in the world, there's a lack of hope. There's a lack of hope for what might happen, for hope, for a future for my children, but there is a promise in the Gospel.

So I would encourage you this in closing - I would encourage you to continue to display the, based on the foundation in 4, 5, and 6, please display the work of God's grace and the work of God in you by doing verses 2 and 3 - "with all humility and gentleness and peace, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit." Show that unity to people around you in Jackson, in Mississippi, show that unity to people around you in countries around the world. Educate yourselves on how the Church is doing around the world. I'm

happy to talk with you for hours in Russian or English about Ukraine, and I have, and I'm sure there's lots of other people and missionary reports, sign up lists you can find, lots of information you can alleviate yourself of, give yourself to, in order to find out how the Church is doing, and use that as your second source of news.

The second thing is this - that you would show that unity to outside of the church. If the first unity that we show, if the humility that we give ourselves to is for those brothers and sisters around us in Christ, the second unity is what other people in Jackson, what other people in Mississippi, and what other people around the world will say about you that "There's something different, there's a unity there, there's almost like a different citizenship that they have. Hmmm, isn't that strange. There's something different about these people. They have something that we don't." And in the United States right now there's no risk of losing your passport, losing your citizenship, or losing your nationality. All three of those are risks, great risks and real risks for many, many people in Ukraine. Their longing and desire to be a citizen of something, something separate from what this world has because a lot of people in Ukraine are just tired of it, tired of the conflict and tired of the instability, tired of the indecision of what might happen next. But there is, in fact, a reality, a real body of Christ in the spiritual world and it's real.

So let me close in prayer praying for the church in Ukraine, praying for our church here, that we can express and display this unity inside and outside. Let's pray.

Lord, we pray that You would give us this unity. We understand that You work it in us. We understand that You develop it in us. Lord, give it to us. Give it to us. Give us this unity, unity that would display to our brothers and sisters in Christ here in this church, unity that would display to our brothers and sisters in Christ in Jackson and even around the world. And I pray also Lord God that this unity would project, would show itself to the world around us, that they would see something different, they would want something different, and they would ask how they can receive it. We pray these things only in Your holy name. Amen.

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