

MAKING SALT

Today's message is nothing new. It's about unity.

We know this lesson, yet.... it is beneficial to remind ourselves about the important concepts and values of unity.

For some reason, we tend to obsess about flaws, weaknesses and what isn't working,.....neglecting the positives and our strengths.

So, this is just a refresher, and it begins with clarifying that unity is not simply "getting along."  
Coping / tolerating / abiding are not necessarily traits of unity.

Unity entails a bond; it is being of one accord on what matters -- the essentials of the glue.

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Looking at the First Corinthians text:

The opening verses are greetings and salutations.

Verse 10 begins the theme that covers the next 3 1/2 chapters, which is the fissure, the infighting and disunity of the church in Corinth.

It seems like Paul is perturbed and flustered, because he quickly tells them to agree upon not being divided.

That sounds absurd: telling disunited people, who can't get along, to suddenly agree on something -- to get along.

However, as strange as it appears, Paul's advice is wise.

Most divisions break down to fighting over insignificant or minor issues. Paul is reminding them to remember who they are and the reason they are together in the first place.

Sometimes, we humans needed to be reminded.

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He reiterates that they, the church, are the body of Christ,...and their division is, in essence, splitting Christ.

They needed to recall their purpose / their core reason for being together.

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Christ divided is Not a pretty picture.

Even small snide, judgmental remarks about another church is ugly.

The same applies to dismissive comments about other denominations.

Divided Christianity at its worst was the 30 years war, back in the 17th century.

The base motivation for the war was which flavour of Christianity would dominate regions, politics,.... and thus power.

Most of Europe was involved, and Germanic areas and Northern Europe suffered the most. It is estimated that 1 million people died, in some areas, 3/4 of the population died.

True, the 30 years war was about much more than doctrinal disagreements, yet it reveals an intensity that arises when passions, control and eternal security are in the mix.

The church includes all those features and more....

Doing church is personal; it is much like doing a marriage.

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Unity in church or in any committed relationship does NOT mean submission or domination, nor does it mean being silent or all parties having a fair share. Unity is not a treaty arrangement.

Unity in committed relationships, such as church or marriage is investing and being IN the creation of the union.

Believers/ followers of Jesus come together to form church--the body of Christ. This is not the sum of all the people. It's not a mosaic of all the flavours. Church is another, unique entity, intended to be as Christ.

Likewise, two people who commit to marriage are investing themselves into / creating a third element--the union of the two.

A marriage consists of the two participants AND the third aspect--the relationship together.

Cohabiting / living together rarely creates the third entity, because commitment / vows to do so are missing.

People living together are getting along; they are in a mutual, agreeable arrangement, and that's usually it.

During pre-marital counselling, I tell the couple, that what they are engaged in doing has never been done before in human history.

The union of those two people is unique--a new creation.

Moreover, fellowship of believers that merely abide together because of common interests and opinions doesn't make them a church.

When there is disagreement, then people simply leave, and that is sad--sad for everyone.....because there is loss..... and Christ is NOT whole. The devotion to creating Christ / the unity is not understood.

The church is more than the collection of its ingredients.

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Consider Sodium and Chlorine.

Both are not meant to exist alone, and each are intense chemicals.

Yet, when combined, they form an essential compound--salt.

And, they union doesn't taste like a mix of sodium and chlorine.

Their combination create something entirely different.

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Also,.....it's not easy to put them together, and almost impossible in their purest, selfish state. They need to be mellowed some by being in combination with other elements--hydrogen and oxygen.

The blending can be done with hydrochloric acid and sodium hydroxide.....producing heat in the process.... that renders Salt and Water.

Blending--mixing ingredients to form a new and different product is rarely easy. ...sometimes there is heat. And, it can't happen with selfish ingredients.

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Another example: short bread cookies.

I love short bread cookies!

They are the result of mixing three ingredients--brown sugar, flour and butter,.... and there's some salt in the butter.

However, it's not so simple as just combining and stirring them together.

The mix must be "needed" / worked for at least 30 minutes.

The needing--the rolling, squeezing and pressing....transforms the characteristics of the three into one.

The first time Leslie made short bread cookies for me, she thought 30 minutes was much too long. So, she worked the dough for about 10 minutes..... and.... the result didn't Work. <

To be sure, the fully blended dough needs heat to be finished.

The cookies are baked.

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I trust the analogy is clear.

A union / a committed relationship / a church is the result of extensive engagement.....of wrestling and struggling,.....with likely some heat tossed in, too.

Merely collecting / putting ingredients in bowl does NOT make cookies.

A church and a marriage requires a lot of hard work, and it may get hot at times,..... and that's normal.

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Yet, for all that to happen, a commitment / a devotion to the end result--the creation is an absolute requirement.

A church's goal, as Paul points out, is to be the united in Christ.

Our motivation for being together must be to become one body in Christ--as Christ in the world today.

Anything less, the group of believers are simply co-existing as long as it feels good, and that is not a church.

A church includes each member, with each flavour, yet as a whole something new is created--the essence of Christ.

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The same with a marriage: two people must work hard to create the third entity--the bond of unity. And, unity is truly a marvelous thing.

In fact, research has shown that people who form a healthy marital relationship live longer and richer lives.

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Nevertheless, it's Not easy, and when the reason for being together is forgotten,..... then the little, personal selfish interests can take over.

Most fights and breakups are over small, selfish concerns that were fed into monsters that devoured the bond.

I've never heard of a couple fighting over how to enhance unity or how best to enhance the common interest of growing together.

Likewise with a church, a denomination or Christendom, divisions are usually about minor doctrinal issues, such as the role of women, divorce or who's allowed to get married.

When we read the Gospels, there are far bigger and more important concerns, such as helping the needy, standing up for the weak, being just, gracious and generous,.... and sharing God's love.

Interestingly, churches don't seem to fight or divide over those issues.

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There are wise words of advice in the Isaiah text.

Listen to a few of them:

Build up, build up.... remove obstacles.... develop a contrite, humble spirit.

Be gracious to those who err or upset you. Work to bring healing. .. because there is peace in the healing / the wholeness.

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All relationships have their ups and downs. There will be differences of opinion and clashes of interests, yet..... it is essential to remember the purpose / the reason for relationship.

The unity is building something bigger than the sum of the ingredients. We must remember that and focus on what is truly important.

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Malcolm Gladwell, points out in his recent book, "David and Goliath" that we tend to obsess about our weakness and that often wrongly assume what is strength.

Goliath roared out his power, and that is what others focussed on, until David stepped forward. David saw opportunity. He didn't feed the negative--Goliath's threat of brute force.

Goliath called to David to come close to him so that his strength could prevail,..... and because Goliath had poor eye sight.

David chose not to yield to Goliath's strength, and instead empowered his own.

As soon as he stood his ground, and pulled out a sling shot, everyone watching became aware that what was unfolding was an unfair fight.

They all knew Goliath didn't stand a chance.

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Let us focus on our strengths--the love and power of God.

Let us focus on what we are called to do: justice, grace, love and peace. And, let us not be tempted to inflate the negative and the fears of our weaknesses.

We are the salt of the earth. We are not sodium and chlorine doing our own thing together.

The same applies to marriage: build up, work at the good,... and recall the delightful taste of short bread cookies.

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At the beginning, I mentioned that this is all a reminder of old stuff we already know, and it is.

The NEW part is what we are creating together,.... and that is what is unfolding as we discover the unity in Christ.