[slide] So a couple of weeks ago we talked about **Anger** [slide] - the dangerous thing it is and the call to be reconciled to brothers & sisters and make friends with opponents. Last week, on the beach, we thought about **Peter** saying “Lord, you know that I love you” and Jesus responding, “Then feed my sheep;” indicating that **our love for Jesus** is the origin of **our service** to the world in his name.

This week I was working through Philippians again and I got to ch2 and read:

[slide] **Phil. 2:1**    If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [slide] **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. **4** Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

**5**    Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Paul had a special friendship- a “partnership in the gospel”- with the folks at *Philly Church.* Despite a bit of “spiritual posturing” going on, they were a “healthier” congregation and they loved and obeyed and supported Paul from the beginning.

Their big challenge is external. [slide] To the patriotic, Caesar-worshipping, Roman citizens of Philippi [mostly retired military] the refusal of these *“Christians”* to worship Caesar was religiously and politically offensive. Since the death of **Julius,** it was understood **Caesar was a god**. The Roman **Good News** is that **the son of god** –Caesar- is **Lord and Savior** bringing **peace to the world**. [Sound familiar? It’s supposed to]. Refusing to worship Caesar made you at best, an “odd duck”- akin to someone who wears a saucepan for a hat- at worst, a “**treasonous atheist”** – a threat to good god & country loving Romans.

The Philly Church members want to know: How do we follow [slide] the Lord Jesus faithfully and deal with this suspicious, if not dangerous political/religious climate? Paul’s answer [part of it]: focus yourselves on **Unity in Christ**.

[slide] **Unity is a challenging topic**- *especially in a culture as big and broad and divided as ours.* As a culture, we have enshrined the rights of the individual- *[all are “created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness….”]* This is good. And the idea itself originates from scripture: [slide] Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. In *Desire of the Everlasting Hills,* **Thomas Cahill** declares this to be the very first argument for the equality of all human beings in the entirety of all world literature. It also argues for the intrinsic value of *every human* and thus the God-given rights of every individual on the planet. *That’s good & true.*

But over my lifetime our culture’s emphasis on individual rights and freedoms has, I believe, displaced any sense of Community we had. [slide] The freedom of an individual’s belief, speech, custom and lifestyle has been *“exalted to the highest place”* causing us to focus on our differences over our similarities. **Community is lost as Unity on any topic becomes virtually impossible.**

SLIDE Our worship of the individual fractures us politically into smaller and smaller factions. We’ve got conservatives and liberals and conservative conservatives and liberal conservatives and liberal liberals and conservative liberals and ultra conservative, conservatives and ultra liberal liberals and ultra liberal conservatives and ultra conservative liberals. Not to mention the Libertarians, and Green Party and the Marijuana Party [not the same] the Christian Falangist party, the Rent Is Too Damn High Party, the Alaskan Independence party- among others. And each despises the rest. Political unity is an oxymoron.

And individualism has had it’s effect on Christian unity too. From the factions in Corinth [I am of Peter/ApollosPaul] SLIDE to the present day mind-blowing 46K Christian denoms world wide [2015 accounting by Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary]. The Puritans escaped persecution only to set themselves up as judges of everyone else’s faith. It still happens. We have code words and litmus tests to determine in or out: GLBTQ issues, abortion, women in leadership, sex outside of marriage, divorce, prosperity theology, gifts of the spirit, King James version only, pre-trib, post-trib, mid-trib rapture or none at all, flags in the church or not, dancing in the church or not, drums in the church or not, hymns in the church or not, etc., etc., ad infinitum. [Our website does not have a “what we believe” page because none of these are faith essentials. And as a congregation we expect there to be freedom in non-essentials.]

Obviously there ARE uncompromising Christian essentials that should unify us [SLIDE] Jesus is Lord and God, sinless, crucified, risen from the dead, coming again etc.] Unfortunately our cultural worship of the Individual -I have the inalienable right to see the world my way, declare it and denounce yours- distracts us with what separates shoeing us away from a **faithful Christian Unity.**

In puzzling this out, I’ve concluded that **Unity within a group** isn’t everyone thinking the same, looking the same, acting the same, liking/hating the same. That’s ants or bees, or zombies or robots or some hive-minded movie-aliens intent on destroying earth.

SAMENESS IS NOT UNITY**.** [SLIDE]

**UNITY is the byproduct of two essential ingredients:**

**1. the recognition and acknowledgement of a relationship to the other and**

**2. the active choice to submit self to that relationship.**

We can find both of these things nicely situated in the first 4 verses of Phil 2.

[SLIDE] **1. the recognition and acknowledgement of a relationship to the other**

**Phil. 2:1**    If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

**Phil 2:1-2 is full of the language of relationship.**

In v1 it’s vertical: between you and God. We’re “united **with Christ**,” we have “comfort **from His love**.” We have “fellowship **with the Spirit**” who empowers heart-felt compassion.

[Heart-felt compassion is to relationship & unity as duct tape is to everything else. Tender heart-felt compassion holds it all together]

We recognize and acknowledge that in this vertical relationship with God there is ENCOURAGEMENT [help/comfort/paraklesis/comfort/comforter], shared LOVE [agape], shared FELLOWSHIP [koinonia,] and shared TENDERNESS and COMPASSION.

In V2 the recognized relationship is horizontal: between you and others. Paul’s focus shifts to our relationship with one another. And it’s causal. He’s saying: since you’ve got this relationship with God full of encouragement, compassion, fellowship and love— let the vertical relationship empower the horizontal. **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

[It’s the same idea from Peter & Jesus last week: Loving the Lord = feeding His sheep]

The relationship you have with God SHOULD result in you being intentionally like-minded, loving each other no-matter-what, with focused intent and purpose.

[SLIDE] **They must recognize and acknowledge** [submit to] **their relationship to God and to one another.** *This is a required and important ingredient of Unity.*

I will illustrate with a commercial from the British equivalent of our Safeway: Sainsbury’s. It’s set during WWI in 1914 at Christmas time and is a dramatized but honest depiction of the events that took place in the Christmas Truce of 1914. **Run spot**

[SLIDE] In this dramatized but historically accurate example these men come together because they **recognize a relationship with the other**: we are human brothers and we share the celebration of Christmas and they **acknowledge that relationship** by singing Silent Night together in English and German. They **submit themselves to the understanding of this relationship** by taking the risk of climbing out of bunkers, and actively setting aside animosity and politics and weapons and sharing the little they had with one another. That’s a moment of unity. *This is the first essential ingredient for UNITY: the recognition and acknowledgement of a relationship to the other.*

The second essential ingredient to UNITY is this:

[SLIDE] **2. the active choice to submit self to that relationship. 3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. **4** Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

**Phil 2:3-4 is full of the language of “active submission of self.” 3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, in humility consider others better than yourselves. **4** …look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. This scripture calls us to **refuse self-important behavior,** to exert our minds to **see others as more important** than ourselves, and **engage ourselves in the concerns** [interests] of others.

*Selfish ambition, self-importance, and self-centered living are poison to UNITY*. We cleanse “the Body” of that poison when we submit ourselves to the relationship. UNITY requires this 2nd essential ingredient: **the active choice to submit self to that relationship.**

[SLIDE] Think of a play. Lots of actors moving about the stage simultaneously, weaving in and out of each other, very swiftly, getting lines in at just the right moment. Everybody had to know where to be and when to be there and what to do while there. *Engage selfish ambition and the whole play is ruined.* **Good actors acknowledge a relationship to each other**- a play-centered relationship.

**And they actively chose to submit themselves to the relationship** out of reverence for something higher than themselves: That’s Unity… *the recognition and acknowledgement of a relationship to the other and the active choice to submit self to that relationship.*

The same is true of Music. [SLIDE] I remember leading worship with Isaac and Derek and Kevin playing drums with me. We did not practice. I came up sat on my stool with my guitar, set the tempo and rhythm and they blended in- they slowed when I slowed, or changed rhythm with me. Knowing they would know just what to do I knew I could drop the guitar out for musical effect having just the rhythm play. It was musical give and take. It was musical mutual submission at it’s best making a single beautiful thing. **Isaac, Derek, Kevin & I acknowledged our musical relationship to each other and we all actively submitted ourselves to that relationship**. [SLIDE] That’s Unity… *the recognition and acknowledgement of a relationship to the other AND the active choice to submit self to that relationship.*

But here’s the thing: in the Christmas Truce and in the Play & Music examples [SLIDE] **unity comes from the individuals submission to something bigger than themselves.** For the actors “the play’s the thing.” For the soldiers it’s Human Brotherhood at Christmas, for the Boys and me it was the music. *For Paul & the Philippians it’s Jesus.* [SLIDE]

**5** Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: **6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **7** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,

When we think of all the theological differences, cultural differences, historical grudges and radical variations in worship style it would be reasonable to think: *How in the world could anyone think it possible to live in the kind of unity Paul is describing to the Phillys?* I have an answer. So does N.T. Wright. And our answers are the same:

[SLIDE] *“The answer must be that everyone must be focused on something other than themselves; and that something is Jesus Christ, himself, the king, the Lord …”*

For the Body of Christ in Port Townsend or the United States, or the Church Universal, “the thing” **the only thing that can possibly bring us to Unity is the Lordship of Jesus Christ.** **Jesus is “the thing***.” The relationship we must recognize and acknowledge is simply our devout LOVE for Jesus- confessing him as Lord and raised from the dead.*

[SLIDE] *If you love Jesus and know Jesus loves you then the acknowledgement of that relationship brings encouragement. His love for you brings comfort to your life. His Holy Spirit connects us all in fellowship and filling us with a tender compassion for all.* At the same time this focus on Jesus love for us should remind us of his own submission of himself to the relationship.

He said of himself: “I am gentle and humble in spirit” [Mat11:29].

He kept telling the disciples arguing over their own “greatness” that true greatness was being “least of all and servant of all.” He even said, referring to himself, **Mark 10:45** …the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Focused on Jesus’ love, comfort and acceptance and Jesus own submission of self, everything else, all that stuff that tears the unity of the body of Christ apart [selfish ambition, self-centered living] should become a hazy blur in the distance to the point where we can, in fact, be [SLIDE] “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

The singular purpose being to love Jesus Christ and be loved by Him and love all the others the way He does.

**We are called to unity in Christ**. [SLIDE] *Unity is the recognition and acknowledgement of a relationship to the other and the active choice to submit*

*yourself to that relationship.*

So when you’re talking with another Christian [face to face or on line] and you feel the unity in the body faltering or you feel that *judgmental piece of you, your inner Puritan, searching for code-words to indicate right belief, your heresy radar spinning wildly, and a growing certainty that you’re understanding is right and theirs is wrong,* and ready to “officially write them off” as misguided or lost

…ask yourself this question: **Do they love Jesus?** [SLIDE]

Better yet, ask them directly: **Do you love Jesus?**

And if they say yes, focus on that. And leave all the rest for God.

This sort of focus on our love for Jesus will not make external opposition go away.

But it will help us stand together in the midst of it.

And we say: Make it so Lord Jesus.

**Phil. 2:1**    If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. **4** Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

**Phil. 2:5**    Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

**Phil. 2:6**    Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **7** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

**Phil. 2:8**    And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

**Phil. 2:9**    Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.