

JC not PC – First in series of Six on Christian Intimacy
Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16 (ESV)

Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV 10th Sunday after Pentecost (August 2) 2015

¹ therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Today's sermon begins a new series that invites us to explore and be open to the fundamental notion of **Christian Intimacy**.

The Call to Worship may have seemed a little bit strange to your ears. It's from the Bible you know – from the Song of Songs. The Worship Committee suggested that we use it for our Call to Worship in the first week of this series, as it is the scripture for the final week of the series.

I feel a little bit strange today, in preaching what I am about to preach. To those of you who read FaceBook, you may have seen a picture I posted yesterday. I was sitting in my mother's sitting room and I happened to notice how the sun was coming in the window over my shoulder. I took a "selfie" picture and posted it. I was just being "artistic" or something. It's a picture of me with my eyes rolled over to the right and up, in the direction of the sun light forming a bright light in the picture. I framed it so that the light takes up a full third of the picture. I added the caption to the picture, on FaceBook, that read: **"This is called 'Getting Sermon Inspiration.'"** One of the comments posted by a woman in my Academy of Spiritual Formation Class was:

You seriously want me to say WHAT?!

That IS a bit how I feel, today. But, after last week's sermon -- where I said that our relationship together was more important than our agreement upon the niceties of the doctrine of Virgin Birth or Trinity – a member told me, jokingly that he was going to build the stake out in the courtyard, for my being burned there. So, I've come this far – or, as **Martin Luther** said: **"I can do no other."**

Do you remember what you were doing on **June 24, 2013**? I do. I was glued to a television, watching **Nik Wallenda** attempt to cross a 1,500 feet long stretch of the Grand Canyon, on a two inch thick cable. It was painful for someone as afraid of heights as I am. But I couldn't tear myself away from it.

As I was preparing this sermon, my mind returned to that feat of skill and courage – or insanity – depending on your viewpoint.

When the wind would get strong or when he needed to regain his balance, the trick was to kneel down close to the cable, pause, get reoriented, and then stand back up, with the 30 feet long balance beam in his hands.

In my return to that tremendous feat, in my mind's eye, I saw Wallenda kneel down, about half way across the canyon, and pull out a bolt cutter from his hip pocket. The network news commentator is providing the voice over:

I don't know what is going on here, ladies and gentlemen. This is definitely not part of what we were told would happen. None of us saw that – what is it – bolt cutter? in his hip pocket, and now in his hand. Let's listen to what he is saying:

Cutaway to the audio transmission to which we have been listening – from the microphone on Nik Wallenda.

How many times have I told those people, I don't like brass mixed in with the steel in my cable. I saw that gold glimmer in the silver, ten feet away. Maybe now they will listen to me, that I am serious. I don't like brass mixed in.

Then Wallenda takes the bolt cutter to the cable and begins to cut out the section of brass mixed in with the steel. The result – I don't need to tell you – when that one 6 inch piece of a 1,500 feet cable is cut out.

THAT is what today's scripture is talking about.

We are in this together. The task of the Christian is as part of the WHOLE BODY OF CHRIST. The importance in the UNITY that we achieve – not uniformity in belief or thinking – but UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST. You can't cut out what you dislike or don't agree with, any more than Nik Wallenda could cut out one small piece of the 1,500 feet long cable that held him up.

There is a **symbol for the Church**, that has been used for centuries. Sometimes we see it in Chrmons put on the Christmas Tree. It's the symbol of a **BOAT** for the nature of the CHURCH. I've heard it explained like this: We are all on this boat together. There are some people that might make us want to jump ship. But compared to being in the ocean alone, we need to figure out how to stay on here together.

Some people say that one of the reasons why the Church is not only ignored, but actually disliked by, a growing number of people, is because we have failed so mightily in our task of UNITY. Think about how many stories you hear about the church fighting over this or over that. Stories about people being not being welcomed or being cast out. There are so many people who would

rather not join into such a mean spirited, puritanical, self-righteous, hypocritical organization. I'm not saying that's what we are; that's what they say.

But, that's not the reason I'm up here preaching about the importance of the UNITY in the BODY OF CHRIST. I'm preaching about it, because IT IS THE SCRIPTURE.

What I am about to say may catch some people off guard; it may be off putting to some. Others may find it downright offensive. And, it's in times like this, when I sometimes wish I could be like those "**prosperity preachers**" who have the huge auditoriums filled with spectators, who say all the things that people want to hear and never say anything to ruffle feathers.

But that is not my job. My job is to proclaim the good news, as Jesus did: **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND**. And, the word that comes before that in Jesus' proclamation is: "**REPENT**" -- which means "**turn around**."

The UNITY of the BODY OF CHRIST is more important than your individual personal salvation.

There, I've said it. Before you quit listening, please hang in there just a few more moments.

Say the Lord's Prayer with me. [do it with them, aloud]

Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

- Q: How does it begin? A: "OUR Father"
- Q: Where does it ever say "I" or "Me" or "Mine"? [A: Nowhere]
- Q: Where does it ever say anything about **MY PERSONAL SALVATION?** [A: Nowhere]

Paul's not making this stuff up about the IMPORTANCE of the UNITY in the Body of Christ. **This is not POLITICAL CORRECTNESS** – the fear of offending anyone. **This is JESUS CHRIST** – the sometimes very, very uncomfortable and difficult task of being ONE with people we don't even like.

What I know about this notion of UNITY is

1. **All of life is fragile**. We have to let go of the gods of security and of control. They consume us. They take us away from the Gospel. They NEVER work out.

2. **All of life is gift.**
3. **It needs to be shared.**

Although I am a Johnny-come-lately to appreciation of baseball, now that I have come on board, I've discovered that we can learn a lot about UNITY in the BODY OF CHRIST from baseball.

We have to get over this notion of everybody being perfect. Not only is it unrealistic, it's also not what is in the Gospel either.

In baseball, it is accepted that those batters who only are successful one third of their times at bat are the superstars. In baseball, statistics are kept of ERRORS. Failures are a regular part of the game. No one expects them not to occur.

If we could start doing this in the church, we would move a great deal closer to the UNITY that Jesus and Paul teach is our DNA, that is our design.

Let me say it again, at the risk of that stake in the courtyard being planted this week:

The UNITY of the BODY OF CHRIST is more important than your individual personal salvation.

This has been a kind of crazy three weeks in the life of the Browns, particularly this last one. I haven't been able to do all that I wanted. I was only able to sit down and read straight through the first three Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I will attempt to get through John this next week. But I can report to you from reading these first three: I never saw a single example of Jesus saying: "Believe in me and you will go to heaven." I never read a single example of Jesus talking about anyone's personal salvation.

But over and over and over, I read Jesus talking about how we are to live together.

The UNITY of the BODY OF CHRIST is more important than your individual personal salvation.

I don't know where we got on this track, in modern day Christianity, of how the most important thing is personal salvation. But, it's preached as such a biggie. I know a lot of Christians that say that this is the ONLY THING that matters. To this I hear Jesus and Paul both saying:

- How self centered.
- How disrespectful of the Gospel.

In a few moments, I am going to hold up a loaf of bread and say the words that have echoed down through the centuries: **The BODY OF CHRIST, the BREAD OF HEAVEN.**

WE are the BODY OF CHRIST.

Jesus is counting on us, to look and act like we believe it.

I'm running out of time today, so let me just add one more small (and, yet, HUGE!) point. Paul told the Church in Ephesus that the Body of Christ is made up of lots of different types of folks. We each have our own gifts, our own calling.

In the Church today, I see an awful lot of two types of people. I see them in front and behind me today, all around me.

TYPE ONE: "I've got to make it work. There is so much to do. If I don't do it, it won't get done."

STOP IT. It's NOT all dependent upon you. God bless you; your heart is in the right place, but that is NOT what you are supposed to do. The Body of Christ is to do its mission with EVERYONE doing their part. Not a few doing everything. Listen to God, pay attention to your gifts, hear your calling: which is often where your gifts, your passions, and there is a need, intersect.

Quit trying to do everything. **We may have to not do some things.** But you are not responsible for it all. It's not good for you and it's not good for the Church. Hear your call. Say yes to that. And then **DO WHAT YOU HAVE SAID YOU WILL DO.**

TYPE TWO: Somebody else will do it. I'm doing good to make it here on Sunday mornings. I know a lot of people who don't come as often as I do. **You are NOT doing your part.** Here's a word that will make some people uncomfortable: Christianity is NOT a spectator sport. The BODY OF CHRIST depends upon you to do your part.

And if those words pinch, then get down on your needs, and ask God if I am right. And then be quiet for a wee bit and listen to what God says.

Are you doing YOUR part FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST.? Not for your personal salvation, but FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST.

God does not want **excuses**; God wants **effort**. The Body of Christ depends on EVERYONE doing their part. If you can't find something that you are called to do, please come and talk to me.

Folks, we are in this together. God loves every one of us. And God has a plan for everyone of us. And God has a plan for His Church, which is called THE BODY OF CHRIST.

And we need to hear the bottom line – as declared in the last verse of today's scripture:

[T]he whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

May we **so do that we may be built up in love**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.