



Pastor Gwen's Message
 7th Sunday of Easter
 "Christ the Head of the Church"
 Sunday May 29, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Christ has risen. . . . He is Risen Indeed!

Our text this morning is once again from the Gospel of John, Chapter 17. This entire chapter is a single prayer. It is often referred to as the "High Priestly Prayer". You see, Jesus is about to be arrested and put to death on the cross. This is his last opportunity to be with his disciples and he wants to pray for them. And interestingly enough, Jesus prays this prayer not only for the 11 disciples that are in his presence, but also for all the disciples to come, and for us. His prayer is for all his disciples to be one in Him, one in Christ Jesus. This oneness mirrors the three faces of God becoming one in our Triune God.

What do you think that the secret of Christian unity is? How does that take shape here at Christ the Servant and in the church in the world today? Or maybe it is easier to think about that in a negative way. What causes churches to become divided? Why do some members leave the church?

Well, as we know some folks have left our congregation, while others have chosen to join in our ministry. I am not pointing fingers at anyone, nor am I saying that we have issues to deal with. In fact, just the opposite. Since our coming to CTS, Rodney and I have fallen in love with this little but powerful church and all of you. We could not be more grateful of how we were accepted years ago and how we are still loved today. But what I would like to explore this morning is what this piece of Scripture teaches us about family unity, about a family of faith that works together in mission for Christ.

When it comes to unity in Christ the first rule is that Jesus Christ is the head of the church. Jesus is the head of this household. Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians says that God, "raised Him, *Jesus*, from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places. .

. . . And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all thing for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” Chapter 1, verses 15-22.

Truly, if this rule is violated, all will come tumbling down. No one in the body of Christ is more important or yields more power than anyone else. And folks that includes the pastor. This is not Pastor Gwen’s church. It is Christ’s church of which he is the head. When this is forgotten, is when we get into trouble and conflict arises.

I have to tell you that since I have been called to his church here in Park Falls, I can count on one hand and not even use all my fingers how many conflicts we have survived. We have found ways to agree to disagree. We have gone to scripture to find answers to important questions.

The mainline churches as a whole have gone through much scrutiny in the past decades as to what they do and believe. I often hear the questions as to why there are so many Lutheran churches, from ELCA to Missouri, to WELS to LCMC and so on. Well, it is man-made rules that get in the way of our unity. In my opinion we all need to go back to Luther’s 4 solas: Sola fide, sola scriptura, solus Christus, Sola gratia. In faith alone by Scripture alone in Christ alone by Grace alone. Christ alone is head of the church on earth and that is rule number one.

Don’t worry there are not as many rules here as Gibb’s had in NCIS or we would be here a very long time. I think when he left the show it was up to 69 rules.

Well, rule number two is that every member of the body of Christ is important to the whole. We have different God given gifts and all are needed in the church. We each have a vital role to play in a healthy, well-rounded congregation. St Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians said, “For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many are one body: so also, in Christ’s. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” Chapter 12, v 12-13

Three weeks ago, we accepted two new members, the Wolff’s, into our church body, CTS. That changed our body and how we function together. Every member counts. Every member is valued and now we are blessed to have two more members to join us in our mission.

I read a short story this week. An economics professor greeted his new crop of MBA hopefuls with an announcement. He said, “We shall begin with a short examination today.” During the groaning in the room, he wrote this question on the board. “What is the cleaning lady’s name?”

The groans turned to snickers and one student was heard saying, “You’ve got to be kidding.” Then the professor said, “If you hope to manage a large corporation one day, first gain the

respect of the people who make it successful. Your success will depend on them more than you will ever know." It was a lesson the students would never forget.

In the church of Jesus Christ, all members are essential to the well-being of the whole church.

Rule #3 is that there will be conflict. Remember a few minutes ago, I mentioned how little conflict we have had here at Christ the Servant. Well, it can and still does happen in our world today. I have a special Ole story for you this morning: Ole was marooned on a tiny island. After several years, a passing ship spotted him there. A rescue team was sent. When they pulled ashore, Ole was beside himself with joy. But before they left, Ole wanted to show them how he had been able to fend for himself, all alone, so successfully on this island. He showed them his house. He showed them his barn and fields. Finally, he pointed out the little church he had built where he worshiped.

After the tour was done, the rescue team noticed another building. It was a little run down. "What 's that building over there?" they asked. "Oh," Ole said, "That's where I used to go to church. But I got into an argument and left and swore I'd never go back."

I guess you can even have arguments when you are alone on an island. But, when two or more egos get involved in working together, there is bound to be some disagreement. Some people find it easier to go along with the flow and not make waves, but when it comes to important things in life, that usually does not happen too often. And remember it is not the conflict that divides, but it is rather the festering of unresolved conflict that is hurtful. Matthew 18 has a clear approach to solving and reconciling disputes. We would do well in learning to put those resolution techniques to use.

Last week I talked about a human emotion, fear. Well, there is another emotion that can be a result of conflict and that is anger. It too is a powerful and intense emotion. Not good or bad in and of itself, it is what you do with it that is important. That is where rule #4 comes in. Ephesians 4:26 says, "Be angry and don't sin. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath."

Many times, in life we hear of how anger has destroyed someone's life. But we must not let anger get the best of us. If we claim that emotion and put it to good use and not to sin, we can have a good outcome. An example is Candy Lightner. Some of you might be familiar with her name. She lost her daughter Cari at age 13, to a drunk diving accident. But instead of attacking

the driver, she chose to attack drunk driving and founded MADD; Mothers Against Drunk Driving. She put her anger to good use to serve others and make a catalyst for change.

The other part of that rule is do not let the sun go down on your anger. I am sure most of you have throughout your life heard the old adage, never go to bed angry. What an awesome and Scripture based idea. Holding on to anger is only punishing yourself.

With all that being said, and the fact that I had most of this message formulated before the tragic event in Texas on Tuesday, there is more to add. It is clear to me that more people need to know Jesus. More people need to share His love.

Although until Christ's return there will still be evil in this world, together in Christ we must come together, as witnesses to the wonderful life God has provided for us. Putting aside our anger we must instead love all those that are hurting at the loss of loved ones and things they have seen in all these senseless tragedies this past month.

No matter what avenue you think our country should go to try to stop this gun violence, we must remember that God is still in charge. We have a God of compassion who wants more for us than for us to experience such acts of violence. God intends us to live together in peace and harmony. God intends for us to live in hope of a life eternal with him in heaven one day. And so, we must continue our prayers for all the elected leaders, victims and their families and the first responders who deal with these tragedies. And pray that we may be instruments of God's peace for all the world as we come together to share His love for each other.

So, our text today gives us lots to think about. Our four rules are put in front of us today so we can present a clear witness in the name of Jesus. The way we love and respect each other is an example to others. Showing how we speak the truth in love will make the church a vital witness. Christ's church will be the light for all the world to see. A light that points directly to God who is gracious to all His children.

So, those 4 rules are important.

Rule #1-Christ is the head of the church.

Rule #2 Each person is important to the whole of the church.

Rule #3 Conflict will come and go, but what is important is how you deal with it.

Rule #4 It is Ok to be angry, but do not sin or hold on to it.

Of I forgot, there is a rule #5; When in doubt refer to Rule #1-Jesus Christ is the head of the church. **AMEN**

Christ has risen. . . . He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!