

Sermon for May 27, 2018 – Third Article of the Creed

Ephesians 4:3-6 (EHV)

**Theme: The Christian Church is a Communion of Saints.**

- 1) United by the Spirit into one Body with one hope
- 2) Baptized into a common faith in Christ.
- 3) Under one Father who is God of all, over all, through all and in all.

*<sup>3</sup> Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in the one hope of your calling. <sup>5</sup> There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all.*

There he lay – a lifeless form of clay. Don't get me wrong: he was a masterpiece – every detail of his body uniquely formed and yet united in a way so beautifully that you couldn't separate the pieces from the whole. He was a wonderful work of art, but that was it – he was no different than Michelangelo's statue of David, or Rodin's "Thinker".

There he lay – a lifeless form of clay – until God breathed his spirit into him. At that moment life began to pulsate throughout every member of his body. Why? Because the spirit God breathed into him united all the individual members of his beautiful body to act and be as one. Thus Adam became a living, breathing being.

And what God did for Adam, he also did for the Church. How so? God the Father created each of us uniquely – choosing us from before the creation of the world to believe in His Son and thus become members of a singular body: his Church on earth. God the Son washed away all our sins and connected us so closely to each other and himself that the Church became more than just an organization. It became a body: his body. But we would remain nothing more than that – a lifeless body – if God the Holy Spirit hadn't been breathed into his Church to give it life. He is the one that unites us all together to live, act and exist as one.

Let us consider these truths and the important meaning they have for us, under the theme: **The Christian Church is a Communion of Saints.** 1) United by the Spirit into one Body with one hope. 2) Baptized into a common faith in Christ. 3) Under one Father who is God of all, over all, through all and in all.

**Part One:** United by the Spirit into one Body with one hope

Our sermon text is found recorded in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It seems as if the Christian congregation in that city was being tempted to allow things like race divide them. And doesn't the devil try to do the same thing in all Christian congregations today - causing divisions on the basis of race, politics, customs, traditions, opinions – you name it! Yes, the devil is good at causing us to selfishly focus on everything but the one thing needful – the Gospel of Christ!

For this reason, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write our sermon text. God wants us to understand that His Church is not just a loose organization of people who work together because they get some personal benefit from it. No, the Church is more than a community; it's a communion – individual members made one by means of the Holy Spirit working through His Word and Sacraments.

For this reason, the Apostle Paul writes: <sup>3</sup> *Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

What holds your fingers to your hands, or your feet to your legs? Ligaments connecting various bones and muscles together. Without ligaments, a body would fall apart and become disconnected from the head.

The Bible compares believers to a body. St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: *though we are many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*<sup>i</sup> And what is the “ligament” that holds us together? It's peace.

Now, understand this peace correctly. It's not the worldly kind that says: “You believe what you believe, and I'll believe what I believe – we'll just tolerate each other in peace.” Such peace doesn't actually “bind” people together. No, it keeps them separate. The only peace that can truly bind believers into one is the Gospel of Christ, concerning which Jesus said: *“If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. The one who does not love me does not hold on to my words.”*<sup>ii</sup>

When Paul, therefore, encourages us to “*Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,*” he is encouraging us to prayerfully make use of God's Word and Sacraments so that the Holy Spirit might strengthen us in the truth; for without him working through the means of grace, we could never know Christ aright, as the Scriptures say: *no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.*<sup>iii</sup>

The Holy Spirit, then, is the one who keeps us united in Christ. He accomplishes this through his Gospel, which proclaims God's peace with us, and enables us all to live in love and harmony with one another – despite all our physical differences and various backgrounds. Unity of the Spirit is only maintained through faith in the Gospel – a faith that is thoroughly God's creation from beginning to end, as our sermon text continues:

<sup>4</sup> *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in the one hope of your calling.*

Do you know why the Third person of the Trinity is called the “Holy” Spirit? Not only because He is holy in and of himself, but because he makes us holy by calling us to repentance and faith through the Gospel. He speaks wherever his Word is taught in its truth and purity – working genuine sorrow and regret in our hearts when we hear his law so as to move us to repent of our sins and working genuine faith and joy in our hearts at the proclamation of what Christ did to forgive our sins.

Yes, the Holy Spirit is the one who makes us holy by creating faith in our hearts. He is the one who unites all believers into one body so as to be a communion of saints – that is to say, a body

of many individuals who are holy through faith, and who have been so closely linked together in Christ that they operate as one. They work together in pursuit of the one hope God guaranteed to them in Christ: eternal salvation and life together with him in paradise.

Just as a soul gives life to a human body, so the Spirit gives life to the Church – acting as its soul, as it directs the Church to fulfill its purpose in the one God given hope all Christians have: eternal salvation, through faith in Christ; as St. Paul continues:

### Part Two: Baptized into a common faith in Christ.

<sup>5</sup> *There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*

Who is our saving Lord? It is none other than Jesus Christ himself – begotten of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, true God and true man in one person. Jesus is the promised Messiah of Old Testament Scripture, who won salvation for all people through his perfect keeping of God’s law on our behalf, his sacrificial dying for our sins, and his resurrection from the dead, which proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that our sins are fully forgiven. We are reconciled to God.

Jesus is more than a great teacher or “son of God”. He is God the Son. Therefore, any faith like Judaism, Mormonism, Islam, Jehovah Witness-ism, or liberal Christianity – that speaks of Jesus in glowing terms and yet refuses to acknowledge him as God - is a false religion that poisons the soul and only leads to death.

For just as there is only one Lord – Jesus – there is only one faith that saves: the faith brought about by the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel itself, as Jesus himself once said: *“If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*<sup>iv</sup>

And how are we brought into a relationship of faith with our one Lord? By means of the sacrament of Holy Baptism, through which we are united to Jesus’ redeeming death and resurrection, as St. Paul wrote to the Romans: *don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.*<sup>v</sup>

And the Holy Spirit not only united us with Christ through holy Baptism, but also with each other through faith in Christ, that we might become one. The Scriptures say: *you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Indeed, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one and the same in Christ Jesus.*<sup>vi</sup>

Do you now understand why it’s so important for us to constantly study God’s Word and make use of his sacraments? Through these means the Holy Spirit awakens and strengthens saving faith in our hearts, connecting us with Christ and each other to such a degree that we form one body – a special servant of Christ - in whom and with whom God the Father is pleased, as St. Paul writes:

Part Three: Under one Father who is God of all, over all, through all and in all.

[There is] *one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all.*

Not only is God the Father (together with the Son and Holy Spirit) responsible for our physical creation, he also planned our salvation from before the creation of the world by asking His Son to win it for us through his cross and by sending the Holy Spirit to awaken and sustain saving faith in our hearts by means of the Gospel.

Yes, our salvation was all God's plan. He is the one who willed our redemption and adoption as his sons. He is the one who rules over all and through all things for our benefit. Together with the Holy Spirit and the Son, God the Father dwells in us by means of the Gospel – fulfilling the prayer Jesus prayed over all believers on the eve of his crucifixion: *May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one: I in them, and you in me. May they become completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*<sup>vii</sup>

Just think: God the Father is at one with us - working through His Spirit as He calls, gathers and fits us together through faith in Christ Jesus. He made one marvelous body out of us – a communion of redeemed saints of whom His Son is the head. And God the Father breathed into this body His Spirit of life, when he poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples both at Pentecost and upon every believer through baptism since then.

Rejoice, therefore, in the great love your Triune God has shown you and *make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit* you have with your fellow believers in Christ. How? By prayerfully using His Word and Sacraments to grow in faith and love. These are the means through which the Holy Spirit promises to work all his wonders and fulfill all his promises, as he moves us all together as one body to obtain the great hope of salvation Christ won for us. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Romans 12:5 (EHV)

<sup>ii</sup> John 14:23-24 (EHV)

<sup>iii</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:3 (EHV)

<sup>iv</sup> John 8:31-32 (EHV)

<sup>v</sup> Romans 6:3-4 (EHV))

<sup>vi</sup> Galatians 3:26-28 (EHV)

<sup>vii</sup> John 17:21-23 (EHV)