

Sermon: One Body Ephesians 4:4

Greetings Christ Church of Wiesbaden and all who are joining us for worship!

It's been 4 Sundays since we last gathered in person for worship and I hope you are holding up well.

I know for some, this time has been a break from a hectic pace of life.

But for others, this time has added stress to your life through increased work hours, learning new technologies, or even missing paychecks.

I want you to know that as a church, we are still here for one another.

Jody Pascual and myself are at the ready as your elders to respond to any needs you may have.

You can call us or our wives.

Additionally, we have drafted 4 other couples in our congregation to serve as "go to" people for your needs- Dan & Kristi Ryan, Matt & Katrina Funk, Jim & Venessa Shields and Dan & Rhoda McGill.

Please, if you have any needs- be they spiritual, physical or financial- please contact any of us.

Also, as you are able, please remember to give tithes and offerings online.

Now, concerning today- this Sunday is noteworthy on two counts.

First, it is the first Sunday of the month and normally we celebrate the Lord's Supper on this Sunday.

Yet we are not going to do that today because the Lord's supper is inherently a group meal.

It's an "all church sacrament" where all in Christ are invited to partake.

Also, the Lord's Supper is a governed meal.

It has to be done in the right way and this means it has to be overseen by the elders.

It's not appropriate for believers to partake of the supper privately because then it would be absolutely ungovernable.

It would even be INAppropriate for me as a minister to offer the sacrament to my family privately because it was never intended to be a private means of grace.

And so on the grounds that we cannot meet and that the supper cannot be properly governed, we are going to fast from the Lord's supper.

I hope that our inability to partake of the sacrament today moves us all to lament and to long for the next time we can partake of it together.

This Sunday is also special because it is Palm Sunday.

On Palm Sunday we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem- where he entered on a donkey and great crowds gathered to welcome him.

Palm Sunday is normally a festive occasion in the life of the church.

Yet it is also very solemn because Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week.

During holy week, we remember that last week of Jesus' earthly ministry.

A great deal transpired during that week and I invite you to follow along with it by reading Matthew 21-27 between now and Friday.

On that Friday in Jesus' life, early in the morning, he was delivered over to evil men and eventually crucified.

And so this Sunday, we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry – and the beginning of holy week.

Normally during Holy Week, we have a Maundy Thursday service.

What is Maundy Thursday?

Maundy Thursday is the Thursday before Easter.

And Maundy refers to the mandate Jesus gave that Thursday.

John 13 records the story of how Jesus met with his disciples in an upper room, on the day before his death.

And at this meeting, Jesus did the unthinkable.

He laid aside his outer garments and then he washed His disciples feet.

This was arguably the most menial and humble task that a person in that culture could do.

It made all of the disciples feel very uncomfortable.

And then when he had finished, he spoke the words recorded in John 13:12:

John 13:12 ... “Do you understand what I have done to you? **13** You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. **14** If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15** For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Then he said in verse 34:

34 A new commandment I give to you [Here is the Maundy- the Mandate], that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. **35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

That is an astounding command.

Think about it. Jesus commanded us to love one another **IN THE CHURCH** the way that he has loved us.

It is astounding to think of the implications of such a command.

Because Jesus loved us to the uttermost and we are to love one another **to the uttermost**.

And by this: **“all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

So, according to the words of Jesus, loving other believers, that is loving the church, is a first-order-marker of what it means to be a Christian.

And so I ask you: Is your love for God's people so evident that people outside of the church know you for it?

Does love for God's people mark you?

This the Mandate of Maundy Thursday.

Our sermon text today is Ephesians 4:4 and this deals with the unity in the church.

Last week we studied the character qualities that promote unity in the church:

Namely humility, gentleness, patience and love.

These lead to what Paul calls in Ephesians 4:3 "...the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

When we truly love one another, we cannot help but be unified.

And in Ephesians 4 Paul tells us just how unified we are in Christ.

He states facts about who we are in Christ and his point in doing this is to call us to real-time unity.

So let us read Ephesians 4:1-6 and our study will be on the first part of verse 4 alone.

The Apostle writes:

Ephesians 4:1 I 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.

This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Pray.

So our study today is on the unity of the church.

A sermon outline is available on the church website.

If you click on the sermon title on the sermons page, that will lead you to the outline.

And the first point there is...

I. The Indispensable Church

Now first, I want to ask you what you think about the church?

How do you regard her?

Is the church indispensable in your life?

And now let me ask you what our community thinks about the church?

If our church, and if all the churches in our area just stopped meeting- just ceased to exist- would our community even know the difference?

I believe that most in our culture view the church as functionally irrelevant.

And this is largely justified.

Because many churches have lost their sense of mission.

And many Christians are so caught up with career, making money and having great experiences that the mission of Christ in the church has become an afterthought.

To make matters worse, many churches have gotten so far of course regarding doctrine that it is hard to argue that they are churches at all.

I'm not nit-picking here.

The central doctrines of the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection and the necessity of faith in Christ's work for our salvation – these central doctrines are not firmly believed in many, many churches today.

In short, Christmas and Easter have been ruined.

Many churches have forsaken the teaching that Christ is THE way, THE truth and THE life.

And that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Many churches have abandoned these central doctrines

And the result is that there is no **burning sense of urgency** in such churches.

There's no sense of Christ as the **ONLY** hope for the world.

And because these churches have left the orthodox faith, the Spirit has left them.

In Revelation 2, Jesus speaks a message to the church at Ephesus.

And while he praises them for some things, he chastises them for One Central Failing:

They have abandoned their first love.

Hear the words of Jesus in Revelation 2:4:

4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.

If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Jesus is telling us that when a church's faithlessness reaches such a level, they actually run the risk of having the Spirit of God leave them.

That is what removing The Lampstand means.

The Lampstand represents God's presence.

And so, in this post-modern age, we are surrounded by churches that stopped being churches a long time ago.

Because they compromised on some of the most central doctrines of the Christian faith: The virgin birth, The Deity of Christ, The necessity of faith in the work of Jesus for salvation, and the resurrection.

And because they have left the apostolic faith and because they have so lost a sense of gospel urgency, Jesus seems to have evidently left them.

And so it is no wonder that the church is regarded by many in our cultures as irrelevant, impotent and useless.

But what if that were different?

What if the church recovered her calling to be a city on a hill and the light for the world?

What if churches everywhere recovered fidelity to Christ and his word?

Proclaiming Christ as the only way of salvation?

What if the church recovered the mission of reaching everyone with the gospel?

In short, what if the church was truly the church?

You see, Jesus set up the church to be HIS body and HIS instrument for revealing Himself to the world.

Jesus has invested everything in the church.

The church is Jesus' chosen instrument for redeeming the world and this means that the church has to be what she was meant to be.

Failure in the church,

unhealth in the church,

doctrinal compromise in the church,

arrogant leadership in the church

All of these things cannot be because the mission is so great.

I imagine the military leaders on the night before D-Day talking to their soldiers, knowing that many would not live to the next night.

Why were they willing to sacrifice so many young lives?

Because the mission was so great.

The menace had to be stopped.

And so D-Day had to happen. The continent had to be invaded. And failure was not an option.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said:

On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Do you see who the participants in this war are:

It's the church against hell.

And so there is no time for the church to be doctrinally compromised or materialistic.

There's no time for church leaders to be arrogant or lazy.

And there is no time Christians to be half-hearted and semi committed.

It's the church against hell.

And Christ is our captain who leads us into the battle and He will get the victory.

In Ephesians 3:10 Paul wrote:

10 through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

You see, God's wisdom is displayed in the establishment and salvation of His church. And so, the church is indispensable in God's mission to redeem the world. She has been given the mission to proclaim Christ, to love one another and to serve as Christ served.

Because the church is so vital to God's plan of redemption, it is vital that the church be unified.

That is, that Christians love one another, be devoted to one another and serve one another.

And Paul knew that any church could be derailed in her mission if she became factionalized.

If people bickered or became puffed up with pride.

Or if people withdrew from the fellowship in order to focus just on themselves.

And so In Ephesians 4, Paul calls the church of Ephesus to humility, gentleness, patience and love.

He tells them to be **3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

Now, to impress upon them the **imperative** of being unified, Paul reminds them of what they all have in common.

In verse 4, he says:

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—

And so this brings us to the second point in your outline, which is:

II. One Body

Paul says: There is one body and this means that there is one holy catholic and apostolic church.

Catholic simply means universal.

And so the one body is represented by the various church congregations of faithful believers that are scattered throughout the world.

There is not ONE denomination that has the claim to being the "one true church."

Not the Roman Catholics, not the Presbyterians, not the Methodists, not the Baptists.

But in as much as these congregations are faithful to the Word of God, they are part of the one body of Christ.

And the believers in them are members of the one body.

The true body of Christ is made up of all born again believers- no matter the denomination.

And so as a Christian, you have spiritual fellowship with every other believer. There is one body and we are all of the same family.

Now, in applying this to our individual congregation, this means that each believer is a member of the local body.

And each believer serves a purpose.

In 1 Corinthians 12:14, Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 12:14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? **18** But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19** If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

Because every Christian is a member of the body, every Christian has a role to play.

There are no insignificant or meaningless members in the body of Christ.

Sure, some members appear to be more useful and others.

But not can be done away with without doing damage to the body.

Perhaps you think of yourself as just a little finger on the body.

You don't consider yourself to be that important.

Yet what happens when the little finger is hurt or not functioning properly?

In real life, we focus all of our attention- brain, eyes, legs and hands at getting that little finger back to health.

No one easily parts with their little finger. No one says, "Oh, just cut it off."

And so, those body parts that seem to be most insignificant are really not insignificant at all.

Every member matters.

And this is why it is so important that you participate in your local church congregation.

It's important that you show up to worship, build relationships and use your gifts to serve.

Because if you don't, the body is incomplete and the mission of Christ is hindered.

Imagine you planned to spend a day working in your garden.

And so you set out to work in the morning.

But before you get started, you look down, and behold, your thumb is missing!
But you know how it is.
Sometimes your thumb is there, sometimes it's not.
It's great when you have your thumb because then you can work much more effectively.

But alas, your thumb has children that are in a soccer tournament and so the thumb is not able to help today.
Gardening without a thumb makes the work harder.
And the mission of Christ is made more difficult when we are not fully engaged.

In our day, there are so many opportunities for work and distraction.
There are so many hobbies to enjoy and so many things we could be doing.
And yet the great tragedy of these many opportunities is that is that regular church attendance amongst believers has never been lower.

One statistic states that today, in churches that are considered healthy and vital, church attendance among believers is at 50% on any given Sunday.
So out of 52 Sundays a year, believers these days are averaging just 26.
Half of the time we are off doing other things.
What's up with that?
How is a church body supposed to function with such irregular attendance?

Hebrews 10:24 states:

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **25** not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Church attendance is not just about following the rules of the bible.

It's ultimately about the mission.

If you aren't regularly present at church gatherings, then you are all but disabled from building relationships and using your gifts.

Not to mention that you are missing out on spiritual encouragement and the means of grace.

When believers are not present and accounted for at church gatherings, the mission is hindered.

What's the saying: 50% of life is just showing up?

Being present matters. Being available matters.

Because the mission is that important.

Remember what's at stake. It's the church against hell.

So I want you to make it a point to pledge to yourself that you are going to be in church every Sunday, as much as you are able.

Sure, there is such a thing as being providentially hindered.

Kids get sick and work can sometimes blow up in an emergency.
But on the whole, you should pledge to be in worship every single Sunday.
Even when you are on vacation, find a church to attend.

They will be glad to have you and your presence will encourage them in the faith.

One commonality that my wife and I share is that we are both products of the church body.

We both owe our Christian faith to the collaborative efforts of various churches.
I remember when I was 14 years old, I was as lost as could be.
Yet there was a church youth group that met at a friend's house just a short walk away.
And because I had nothing better to do and because I didn't seem to belong anywhere else, I started going to their meetings.

And there I was loved.
I learned to read the scriptures and pray.
I learned to sing Christian songs that I still remember.

This family being willing to host the youth meeting led to me coming to faith.
And their service was such an ordinary one in the body of Christ.
They were just being hospitable - opening their home to 12 or so teens for two hours a week.
Yet this ordinary service had an extraordinary effect on my life.

And this is the way that Christ works in his church.
He works through ordinary Christians offering up their ordinary gifts in order to accomplish extraordinary results.

So are you willing to invest in the ordinary life of the church?
Through regular worship attendance, building relationships, hospitality and service.

It's through these ordinary works that the body of Christ is strengthened.
And in doing this, you are fulfilling the new command of Jesus:
The command to love one another as Christ has loved us.
Amen.