

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Finding Unity & Agreement"
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Seventh Sunday of Easter

There was a time when I thought agreement with another person was the easiest thing in the world. I also thought that most rational people thought similar thoughts about the world and life. Clearly I had much to learn. I started university and found a different world, with more profound differences in worldview than at high school, although they were evident at high school, they weren't as deep. All of a sudden, not only were atheists, agnostics, Christians and other people of religious and spiritual paths talking past each other, Christians themselves found it hard to agree. And strangely enough, Religious Studies at the university often was a place that would challenge and reject religious people, rather than welcome and encourage their faith.

Perhaps it is not just me who thinks that others might think the way they do, and therefore, we might simply get along because we think similarly. Of course, getting married also challenged this view. And, by the way, marriage is supposed to challenge our views, at least I think so. And so all of a sudden, I liked nighttime activities, she liked morning activities. I had a tendency to be overly warm and sought the cool; whereas she had a tendency to be cold and sought the warm. She liked camping; I liked hotels. And the list could go on. But we worked out loving God together, loving the congregations to which we have been called. We worked out more than a dozen moves to places we had never visited, let alone lived in. We worked together in French, in counseling training courses and in counseling, in the woods and on the sidewalk, with people who were easy to love and those not so easy. We marked thirty-four years yesterday of living together and working together; of home-schooling and home-renovating and homeworking.

What I realize is that agreement is a precious gift, that is not simply there automatically. Unity and agreement come with cost and commitment.

Sometimes unity and agreement bring forth great events. Sometimes they bring forth questionable events. The disciples in the first chapter of Acts take their first vote and their first work of church government; that is, to find a replacement for Judas. They choose Matthias, but one has to wonder if

this was just a human need and decision; and that God had supernaturally intervened in choosing Paul as the twelfth apostle later on in the ninth chapter of Acts. We hear nothing more of Matthias. But it is possible this agreement for replacing the one lost, even if by casting lots, which is sticks or stones thrown and interpreted, was still an act of agreement and a gift, based on Scripture, to the early church.

How do we find agreement together in the Church? The early apostles looked to the Scriptures, and we are to do the same. Psalm 1 puts a high value on reflection time offered to the reading and understanding of Scripture. Such an investment in Scripture reflection is like planting a fruit tree by a consistent water source, so that tree will always bear fruit and not wither away like many which have no water and therefore wither and die. In the desert, your water source is your key to life. In the spiritual life, your taking time to acquaint yourself with Scripture through reading and studying the book is the key to life and bearing fruit; rather than simply withering and dying. Also, attention to Scripture may also help you fight your rebellion against God and fight any tendency we may have to scoffing, that is, ridiculing or belittling other believers.

John in 1 John 5 is even clearer about how we might achieve agreement with one another. In the passage we read this morning, it is clear to John that there is a testimony, that is an eye witness account, to the fact that Jesus brings life. John makes it completely black and white: you either have a living relationship with Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, or you do not. There is no in between. Those in relationship with Christ may be able to find agreement based on that family relationship.

Week after week I seek to offer you this relationship, and for those who already have the relationship, to encourage you in that relationship. It begins by saying “yes” to Christ in the core of your being, and “no” to your rebellion against God. Confessing our sins and turning away from our sins to God through Jesus Christ is the centre of the Gospel message that we hold as the core of what we believe.

Once we are certain of this relationship with Christ, knowing Jesus as Master and Saviour, then we can move on to realize some of the benefits. John 17 is where we hear our Saviour praying for us. It was in the Upper Room, just after Jesus had told his followers that we will have trouble in this

world, but not to be overwhelmed with that fact, that he had indeed overcome the world.

Jesus' prayer then lists many promises that are ours because we are in relationship to Jesus as Master and Saviour:

- 1) the revelation of God
- 2) acceptance of that revelation, the words of God,
- 3) the fact that Jesus comes from God,
- 4) that everything Jesus has is God's, and everything God has belongs to Jesus
- 5) that all believers will be protected and kept safe, and not lost;
- 6) that the joy Jesus had is ours within us,
- 7) even when others might hate us for what we believe,
- 8) we are protected by the Lord in the world
- 9) we are not of the world, but our citizenship is in heaven
- 10) we need to be set apart to God by hearing the truth of the Scripture
- 11) we will gather others to believe as we do,
- 12) we will experience unity as Jesus is one with his Father, so we will be one with each other, a miracle of agreement on a supernatural message, even as the persons of the Godhead, of the Trinity are one with each other
- 13) Complete unity is ours as we trust together in the One who was sent by the One who sent him, and to give the One to us so that we will be one in that One, taken up in the unity of the Trinity.

There is our ultimate agreement, as we trust Jesus together. It will not be perfect on this earth. There will be many times of testing. But it will be complete in the new life, in the life to come. Meanwhile we give thanks for the precious gift of agreement, particularly in spiritual things, those areas of life closest to the heart of God.

Let us pray.