

From fifth grade until eighth grade, I attended a Lutheran day school in Shawnee Kansas where my dad was pastor. Among the many memories from that place, one of those that sticks out is chapel time. Almost every time we would meet for chapel, our principal would stand in front and lead us in song. And almost without exception we finally got to a song which some of you, although not all of you might be familiar with. We warmed up with the verse, but then came the chorus. “And assembled as one as one in the name of the Son. Lifting hearts, lifting hands, celebrating as friends and proclaiming the Lord, all our praises afford we are brothers and sisters in Christ.” Good memories indeed. But it wasn’t just the words that made that song one of our favorites. When you get to the part about celebrating as friends and being brothers and sisters in Christ, you would grab the hand of the person next to you and sway back and forth a little. It was a show of unity, a show that we were all brothers and sisters assembled as one.

Our text for the day says this: “Bear with one another in love.” And that sounds pretty nice and flowery. It is a phrase that would be suitable for framing and placing on the wall of your home. Its words are probably as beautiful as a chapel full of kids swaying together as they sang a song about unity.

Of course there is one thing that I should mention about singing that song in chapel. Of course when you got to chapel you made sure that you were sitting next to people that you wanted to join hands with. No, you didn’t want to be forced to hold hands with the girl that no one liked. You didn’t want to be swaying with that kid that really made you mad the day before at recess. Yes, we had to admit that they were part of the group, yes even brothers or sisters, but we would rather assemble at one from a distance with them.

I suppose those actions could be viewed as very childish. But more accurately, they should be viewed as just very human. Let me ask you a question about when you come to church. How often do you talk to anyone after church that you don't already have a good relationship with? Why not?

Perhaps it is because we don't want to be stuck next to them in case a good rousing rendition of brothers and sister in Christ starts up and we would be forced to hold their hand. Yes, we will admit they are members of our church, fellow Christians. But they are different than us. They hang out with different people. They look different. They disagree with me about how things should be done at church. They upset me when they spoke up the other day.

After all Pastor, do you know what they do when they are not in church? Yes just like children, we tend to be careful to pick our spot in the church surrounded by those people we are ready to hold hands with, ready to sway with, ready to admit our oneness with. After all it is not that bad, those other people have their own friends, or if they don't they seem to leave church really quickly anyway.

As I mentioned, our text says, "Bear with one another in love." But perhaps a more down to earth literal translation in our language would be, "Put up with one another in love." Ephesians makes clear from the get-go that the church is full of people who still carry around some faults. And we don't need Paul to tell us that to know it. We are well aware of each other's faults. Most of our faults jump out at you from time to time without much real digging. And that is why Paul says, "Put up with one another in love." We are never going to all get along because we all are without faults. We get along, we function as the body of Christ, because we put up with one another's faults.

Why should we do this? After all putting up with some people is hard work. Paul tells us that we do it because we are one. It is that we are putting on an act of being one, we are one. And how did we get to be that way? Well, Paul doesn't say we the Ephesians are one because they happen to all live in Ephesus. We are not one here at St. Paul's because most of our ancestors all settled in this general area. Paul didn't even tell them that they were one because they all got together on Sunday morning to worship in the same place. That is not the source of our unity either. Why were they one? Why are we one? Well it all started for us at this font. For almost all of us here, each of us had our head hung over this font when we were baptized. And everything that was said that day made one thing clear, we were becoming part of something larger than ourselves, namely the kingdom of God, the family of God, the body of Christ. And from that day we shared one Lord, one faith, one baptism and One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Having the same father we naturally became brothers and sister's in Christ. This is our source of our unity, our baptism, our faith all centered in our Lord and our Father. That water made sure that people that look different, people that had different views, people have truthfully hurt one another from time to time could still assemble as one.

We must admit that at times we like to confess with our mouths our oneness with all who were baptized at this font, but that our lives do not show that same truth. We are far from joining hands and swaying with all of the people gathered here. But Paul calls us today to put up with one another in love. One other thing we all have in common is the fact that we all have some things in our lives that take some putting up with. It is called sin, and it invades even

our Christian lives more than we care to admit. But we also share the same answer to that sin. Our answer is the one Lord that Paul speaks about.

The “one Lord,” who when he was on the cross, hung alone so that he could bring us all together in Him. His disciples had fled. On either side of him were two criminals just as weak as he was with no opportunity to reach out and befriend Him. Rather, this “one Lord” was held up by two Roman nails. There he stood alone, deserted even by his Father himself. There Christ hung by himself with all the sin of the world weighing him down. And because he stood alone with all of our faults, our sin, we stand together.

Because he died and rose, our Baptism which connects us with his death and resurrection becomes the very means by which we assemble as one. It is the reason why today after church I encourage you to reach out and shake someone’s hand that you normally wouldn’t. You are one with each person here through the grace of Christ. Since God forgave all of your sin, you are willing to put up with, yes to forgive, each other’s sin also. And having forgiven each other of our faults, we are ready to grab hands with anyone here and to know that the words of the song are not just a nice thought, but a present reality at our church. When we gather at the meal we often call communion, we can know that that meal offers us the forgiveness necessary not only to make us one with God, but also to make us one with one another as well. Yes, leaving Christ’s altar makes it possible to sing that song in truth.

“And assembled as one as one in the name of the Son lifting hearts, lifting hands, celebrating as friends and proclaiming the Lord, all our praises afford we are brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Amen.