

Sermon Draft

Text: Ephesians 4:1–16

Sermon: “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism”

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism” the giver, the received gift, and the means of (grace) delivering the gift, through Christ Jesus. In the Old Testament Reading, a community of faith (though unwilling and grumbling) desired food, and the Lord, out of his faithfulness, promised to give bread from heaven, manna. Christ reminds his hearers about this gift of manna in our Gospel. Gifts received, and gifts taken for granted or even forgotten. Not just back then but today with us also.

In between the Old Testament reading and the Gospel lesson the two texts reminding us of the bread that comes down from heaven we have another reminder from Paul that we have been created, redeemed, and called to be one Body, through one Lord, who grants us one Baptism for the remission of sins. This Body then partakes of the body of Christ, the true manna come down from heaven.

It's not easy getting us to all go in the one direction, even as Christians, even though we are one body in Christ. Many parochial schools have found a unique way of keeping students together when going from one place to the next. It used to be something like herding cats to get the children from the school bus to the classrooms and then from the classrooms to the playground or wherever.

The idea is for the teacher to hold the end of a long rope and the children each hold a bit of the rope, all staying in a single line while walking together calmly and heading toward where the teacher leads.

We Christians have a tether as well in the words of Paul and in the creeds. Together, we confess the Father, who is the Creator; the Son, who has redeemed us with his precious blood; and the Holy Spirit, who has sanctified us, brought us into the faith, and guides us by his love. This tether reaches all the way back to creation and reaches all the way forward to the resurrection of the dead. This tether is what the Holy Trinity has done for us, and we make a right confession in unity and love, walking together in Christ's grace.

“Deeds not creeds!” was the cry of evangelical voices from the past, yet a deed hardly defines positivity or negativity. After all, murder is a deed just as much as almsgiving is a deed. So much in life seems to live in the convenient land of ambiguity. It’s nice there. I don’t have to stand on any firm ground in that land, and as long as I’m doing something, it has to be “just fine” with Jesus; after all, our deeds trump the creeds.

Then again, perhaps what we confess about Jesus is the same work of the Holy Spirit that also strengthens us in faith toward him and fervent love and charity toward one another. That is Christianity. We do not pit deeds against creeds, as they sing and work in harmony through the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, we have been created by the Father, redeemed and fed by the Son, and called into faith and unity through the Spirit, by which all Christians are called to cherish this faith and live in charity.

I love our creeds all three of them, the Apostles Creed, known as the Baptismal creed (written in the 2nd century, author unknown),

the Nicene Creed, which intends to clearly state on the basis of Scripture that Jesus Christ is true God, equal with the Father, and the Holy Spirit is also true God, equal with the Father and the Son (written in 325 and finalized in 381 by church leaders at the Council of Nicaea and council of Constantinople) and the Athanasian Creed, confesses the teaching of the Trinity and the person and work of Jesus Christ (6th to 8th century author unknown but named after Athanasius who was instrumental in the drafting of the Nicene Creed).

From prison, Paul writes to the Ephesians and to the Church, the Body of Christ, of all time and history. Unity in the Spirit is something that the Church as a whole should love and cherish (vs 1–3). We have been called by the Spirit into faith and are bound together by the great love of Christ.

The hymn “Where Charity and Love Prevail” composed in the 9th century and translated to English in the early 60’s reminds that peace comes where both are found.

Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found; Brought here together by Christ's love, by love are we thus bound.

With grateful joy and holy fear His charity we learn; Let us with heart and mind and soul now love him in return.

Forgive we now each other's faults as we our faults confess; And let us love each other well in Christian holiness.

Let strife among us be unknown, let all contention cease; Be His the glory that we seek, be ours His holy peace.

Let us recall that in our midst dwells God's begotten Son; As members of His body joined, we are in Him made one.

No race or creed can love exclude, if honored be God's name; Our family embraces all whose Father is the same.

Yet, we do not love one another as we ought. We have grievously sinned against one another. We have replaced charity and love with deceit and self-advancement. Paul beckons us to walk in the Spirit and in a manner worthy of our calling into the faith, but we run toward the changing winds of our lustful and greedy desires.

Paul calls us to bear one another's burdens, but we dump our neighbors like a bad habit when a better opportunity comes along. We are called the Body of Christ, yet we have tortured him with our sins against him. Still, Paul tells us that there is hope in that same Christ Jesus.

Paul's message is that unity is found through the verbs of the Trinity. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote from his own prison regarding the Body of Christ, lamenting that it has been "blemished" and "scarred" in so many ways (cf *Why We Can't Wait* [New York City: Signet Classic, 2000], 80).

As sinners who have been brought into the Body of Christ through Baptism, we are unified in the creed that Paul spells out for us in his letter from prison. We have done far worse to the Body of Christ, his Bride, than mere social injustice.

We have despised the preaching of the Word of Christ and have doubted the words we confess. We have departed from one another, broken and at horrible odds with our brothers and sisters, that is, the bones and flesh of the Body.

Still, there sits Paul, writing to us who wound our Lord, saying, "***But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift***" (v 7). And he has spelled it out for us in language that soon gave rise to the Apostles' Creed we've echoed since the ink dried (vs 4–6). The Father is one God who made all things. Christ by his death and resurrection has attained and given us grace (vs 7–10).

The Holy Spirit has called us into the faith and to love—unity with one another (vs 11–14).

Paul urges us to confess rightly and in love according to the grace that has been bestowed upon us. *“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love”* (vs 15–16).

The Church has a beautiful gift in the Apostles’ Creed that was crafted in truth, God’s Holy Word. In it, we confess the creation and goodness given by our Father; that Jesus Christ is true God, who suffered, died, was buried, and rose again for our sake; and the unity bound by the Holy Spirit. This is the voice of the Church, and it holds all the truths of Christ.

Christ’s great love for us culminates at the Lamb’s high feast, where together we eat the flesh of the Son of Man and have life in us. In partaking of the Sacrament, we find true unity, for the Holy Spirit has brought us to the Table in fellowship, love, and forgiveness.

From there, we arise and leave God's house charged to love our neighbors and forgive them as Christ has forgiven us.

We are called to speak the truth, grow in faith toward Christ who is our Head, and move as one Body, waiting together for the return of our Lord and the resurrection of all flesh. All this we believe and confess with one voice as Christ's true Church on earth.

Amen