

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33
Psalm 130

Ephesians 4:25-5:2
John 6:35, 41-51

There is no I in team. That phrase is used to imply that victory is achieved not by any single individual, but through players coordinating their efforts together. Michael Jordan, in his Hall of Fame induction address in 2009 shared, "I can remember a game, we were down with about 5 to 10 points. I go off about 25 points, we come back and win the game, we're walking off the floor. Tex (Winter) looks at me and says 'There is no "I" in team!' I look at Tex and say, "There's not, but there's an "I" in win!" Thank you Michael Jordan for destroying my illustration. Anyway, being a Christian means being a part of a team. It is not an individual sport. It is a team sport. Here in his letter to the Ephesians the apostle Paul encouraged them to be team players, thereby encourages us to be team players. Paul appeals to the church to live as members of a community.

I will admit, sometimes the church community can be a bit feisty! Churches are known for good fights. Through the centuries has been notorious about conflict and strife. Church members may be angry about being outvoted. People threaten to hold their pledge, or even leave, because of something the church has done or said. Churches split over various issues. The church I grew up in is no longer a PCUSA church over the issue of ordaining women. Churches are now leaving over the issue of homosexuality. At the last General Assembly, the GA literally closed one presbytery for the members of the presbytery were literally getting into fist fights! The very fact that there are dozens and dozens of Presbyterian denominations illustrates conflict and strife in the church.

So when we hear the words of this opening hymn, *We Are One in the Spirit*, and when we sing the refrain, "And they'll know we are Christians by our love," we may think

to ourselves, “Yeah, right! When hell freezes over.” When we hear the words that “all unity will one day be restored, we may very well snicker.

The church has always been plagued with strife, conflict, and discontent. Evidently the church in Ephesus, a church of the first century, also had its problems. Paul saw the bitter fruit of the conflict: lying, anger that festers in the heart, stealing, evil talk, bitterness, wrath, wrangling, and slander, all of which grieves the Holy Spirit. Who would want to join the First Church of Ephesus?

The church is not made up of perfect people. The church is made up of sinners. Some years ago I received a rather scathing email from one of the church neighbors. Something happened out in the front lawn of the church one Sunday that really upset them. In their email they asked, “What kind of members do you have in that church?” I wanted to say, “People like you, sinners.” I did not respond that way, but I did say the church is made up of sinners. As someone once said, “The church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners.”

And yet, as Christians, we are to live transformed. We are transformed because we have been baptized. In the few verses before our passage for this morning, Paul tells the Ephesian converts to discard their old nature and don a new one. This putting the old self to death and putting on a new self, a new creation, is symbolized in our baptism. In our baptism, we go from the old self to the new self. Going under the water symbolizes dying to the old self, and coming up from the baptism water we are raised with Christ in a new life. In baptism the old self is killed off and the new is raised. Paul uses this imagery of baptism quite frequently. In the very early liturgy of the church, baptismal candidates faced the west and renounced the forces of darkness. They then

turned to the east at sunrise and proclaimed their allegiance to the light of the world. And they literally stripped off their old clothing and put on the new garments of being adopted by Christ as children of God.

In the Presbyterian Church, baptism is not to be a private act, but is to take place within the worshipping community. It is done within the community for this sacrament declares we are a part of the community of faith. Baptism is our being included in the community of faith. In our baptism rite we hear, "We are made members of the church, the body of Christ, and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice." Paul, in this passage from Ephesians, describes how life in the community is to be lived. In this passage Paul warns against the vices that destroy the baptismal community and at the same time holds up a difficult but transforming path.

So what does this new life, this transformed life look like? As I list some of these vices, consider how they are destructive of the communal nature of our lives. Put away falsehood, do not let anger fester, let no evil talk come out of your mouth. Put away bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, and malice. There is one very interesting vice, "Thieves must give up stealing." But note why Paul says thieves should give up stealing: "Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy." The reason Paul gives is not that hard work and honesty are to preserve the sanctity of private property. It is not so that one can support oneself and one's family. Thieves are to invest their time and energy in self-support so that they may be in a position to join the community's care for the destitute. Thieves are to work so that they can join in the community's care for the destitute! The work ethic is transformed into participation in Christ's ministry. As

one New Testament professor suggests: “The author challenges us to imagine what it would be like if we made our decisions based not on whether choice A or B would bring us the best paycheck, highest status, and most comfortable life, but whether it would allow us to serve those in need.” This statement about thieves impresses upon us that as Christians we are to be concerned not about our own well-being, but about the well-being of the community. Our question, as Christians, is not, “Are you—singular—better off than you were one year ago, five years ago, ten years ago. Rather, the question is are all of us better off than we were one year ago, five years ago, ten years ago.

On July 19, 1996, Chad Kreuter, a reserve catcher for the Chicago White Sox, severely dislocated and fractured his left shoulder on a play at home. He underwent surgery, and the Sox placed him on the sixty-day disabled list. That’s the kind of thing that makes a backup player feel even less like a part of the team. But quite the opposite happened. Apparently Chad’s teammates had a strong liking for him; each player put Chad’s number 12 on his ball cap to show support. Chad was a member of the team whether he played or not. As you can imagine, that meant a lot to Chad. Later in the season when he was able to suit up again, he showed his appreciation by, you guessed it, putting the numbers of each of his teammates on his ball cap. That is the kind of community the church, you and I, are to live and experience.

One of the two sacraments of the Presbyterian Church is the Sacrament of Communion, which gets its name from the same root we get community. Today, and every time we celebrate this sacrament, may it be a reminder to you that there is no “I” in church.

Now to the Holy One
who is at work within us,
accomplishing far more
than we could ever ask or imagine,
to God be all glory
in the church and in Christ Jesus,
now and forever. Amen.