

Unity and Diversity Sermon - Ps 133 and 1 Cor 12. 12-31

General

Good morning, we're taking time to look at our values this Summer [our values as people and a church **matter**, as one commentator said....."If you don't stick to your values when your being tested, they're not values, they're hobbies"] –Today we're looking at unity and diversity.

Intro - Unity and Diversity

A while ago I met up with one vicars who simply lamented "Why can't the church get along with each other?" And when we look at our daily news, we see story after story of couples, families, colleagues and neighbours struggling to live peacefully in Community? Different ages, stages, races, genders, classes, education, professions, characters struggling to live peacefully together – we're divided by our walls of difference....Yet Christians believe that at the heart of this problem we have a solution, it's called Christian peace-making, the breaking down of these barriers – *At St Swithin's we're called to Make peace, bring peace, be peace its why we did the **Peace-making course** just before lockdown*

So why Diversity?

Our current western culture loves to celebrate diversity, driven by technology and a postmodern attitude, we assert our equality and individual rights, recognising our differences and affirming our common humanity. It's overwhelming individualism, constantly challenges our need for Community. Christians too, celebrate our uniqueness, humanbeings, created in the image of God, carrying the Father's likeness, all with a unique contribution to make to this world

*Everyone is welcome to be part of God's family, however broken, however dirty, however cultured or however successful all are welcomed **with love** not tolerance. But this provides a massive challenge to us, Anyone who has lived in close community will know how difficult this is. Most of us like to gather around people like us', the right people. But christians, are called to love our enemies, care for strangers, look after the poor, lonely and widows and broken - we are a church with good news for all.*

Serving a massively diverse parish, with differences everywhere, all of us with our own gifts, quirks, failings and weaknesses – community building is going to be hard work. But the Biblical picture of Family and of One Body of many parts is incredibly powerful – we were created for community, room for all the many and varied body parts, ears, eyes, nails, lips, legs all are different but necessary for the body to function as a whole.

When was the last time you welcomed a stranger into the St Swithin's family?

So why Unity?

Psalm 133 speaks of the power and beauty of unity, how Good, how good it is when God's people live together in Unity - how good God's people live together in Unity

I've loved being part of teams all my life, and I've endured incredible highs and some really low points but the joy has been in sharing it together, sticking together, supporting each other, helping each other, affirming and cherishing each other and moving together

At the heart of church, the essence of church is something truly amazing wonderful and beautiful. St. Augustine said that 'God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love.' And if you had been the only person in the world, Jesus would have died for you. That's how much God loves you, this morning.

In Jesus Christ's his life, death and resurrection, God has broken the dividing walls of selfishness, greed and pride and sin, uniting us into God's family means our relationships with God and each other are completely transformed, WHY? **Because being part of God's family puts us at peace with God and peace with one another.**

Holding unity and diversity together has proved extraordinarily difficult for the church. Disunity, within the church is an absolute scandal, we get puffed up with pride, critical of others, that we need to repent over. But also heed St Augustine, who said "***In the essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; but in all things charity***". In John 17 Jesus prayed about church unity. Unity rooted in love and forgiveness will give the world a visible demonstration of God's love.

Conclusion

We are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a unique part of it.' Bishop Lesslie Newbigin said this: 'Jesus Christ never wrote a book; what he did was leave behind a community: the church.' 'We are the church, and We are Christ to the world.' So each one of us represents Jesus wherever you go—in your family, in your place of work, in your neighbourhood, in your leisure activities. You're Christ. So my encouragement to you is to get involved. Don't just be a kind of consumer; be a contributor to this glorious technicolour church here in Walcot. Let's pray

PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for the delight of being united to you, of being part of the church of Jesus Christ, your family. {Forgive} We pray that the Unity of the spirit and the bond of peace would grow amongst us. Continue to break down walls the dividing walls between us by your Spirit that people would see Jesus through us. May your kingdom come and your will be done. AMEN