

Acts 4:5-12
Psalm 23
1 John 3:16-24
John 10:11-18

Sermon April 21st, 2024

Jesus' Hope for Unity

In our gospel, Jesus insinuates that his message isn't the only one out there offering a way to follow that is in opposition of the Empire's way. In fact, history tells us there were quite a few movements that rose up around Jesus' time to confront the Empire's oppressive rule. Some of these movements even became violent.

We also see in our gospel that Jesus wants to be clear that he has his own unique message that he invites people to be part of. Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd. A leader who cares about the sheep in his flock. A leader who will give his life for the sheep.

Jesus is hopeful that this message will not only speak to the sheep in his flock, the people who have listened to his message and believe in it. But, also, to those who to this point have resisted his message.

Jesus goes on to challenge the leaders of these other movements very bluntly with the intention to gather all the sheep into one-fold. To unify the herd. To break down the fences that are dividing the flock.

Likewise, the early church proclaims this story of Jesus with similar intentions. To gather the church as one body. To challenge those leaders within the church who keep building up dividing fences. According to John, Paul, Peter, Mary Magdalene, James, we are stronger as one body than as a fractured body.

Throughout the centuries the church continues to share this story with the hopes of bringing unity to the church. Of challenging those leaders who continue to preach a message that divides us. That scatters the flock. To challenge the sheep to celebrate their diversity while seeking out what they share in common. So, to come together as one body.

In our context, we are dealing with the consequences of being a scattered flock in a world where it is very hard to be the church. There are many of us churches living separately from one another. Trying to figure it all out on our own. Holding on to messages from past leaders who unfortunately created fences in the churches that are hard to bring down. Trying to survive with less resources.

In South Calgary, we, the Lutheran churches are hurting. The harsh reality is there are not enough pastors to fill the vacancies. Some of us do not have enough resources to

support a full-time pastor or to support other vital ministries in the church. And yet, we don't really want to share a pastor with another community, do we?

We are not using our buildings to their full capacity. And yet, we are very attached to our buildings. Making it much more difficult for us to come together with another church.

There are still some differences in how we do worship, how we define being an inclusive community, how we live out our ministries in the community. Differences we are having a difficult time reconciling with.

Being a unified church isn't an easy path as Jesus finds out in his ministry as he tries to reform his faith. As John witnesses in his ministry in the early church. As Paul witnesses as he tries to gather Gentiles and Judeans together as one. As Martin Luther witnesses when he is trying to reform the church in the 16th century. As many Christian leaders continue to witness when trying to bring congregations together.

Being a unified church isn't an easy path for the sheep in the pen. It isn't easy to let go of some of our buildings so that we can use the buildings that remain to their full capacity. It isn't easy to reconcile some of our differences so that we can pool our resources together to be able to support a full-time pastor, as well as, the vital ministries of the church. The path to unity isn't easy.

But as N.T. Wright, a well-respected professor and arch bishop in the church of England, states in an interview, this is the future of the church. We need to reconcile our differences and come together as one. We need to find ways to form partnerships so we can use our resources to the best of their ability.

Can we imagine a South Calgary where the five Lutheran congregations become one? Where our resources are plentiful once again. Where we feel like we can actually do ministry in our community once again. Where we can be Christ's hands and feet in the city we love.

Can we imagine a South Calgary where we live in unity with one another? Like Jesus imagines for his followers. Like John, Paul, Peter, Mary Magdalene, James imagine for the people they lead. Like Martin Luther imagines for the 16th century church. Like many of us leaders imagine for the 21st century church.

Can we imagine a South Calgary where we the churches live in unity with one another?

Let us pray, gracious God, we are a scattered people in need of hearing your unifying voice. Open our ears to listen. Open our eyes to see all the possibilities unity opens up for our congregations. Open our hearts to walk with our Lutheran siblings down the path to unity and new life. **Amen.**

