

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Unity, not Uniformity

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Scripture:

Philippians 2:1-11

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Transcript:

Good morning. Good morning. It is so great to be with you all in worship this morning. My name's Annie Duncan. I'm the executive pastor here.

I am Isabelle Neza, and I'm mentoring with our care department.

And this morning, Neza and I ... She goes by Neza. We are going to tag team the sermon.

Yes.

And we've done this before.

We have.

March 1st, 2020.

Yeah. And we'll love to show you a picture of our last preaching together.

Yeah. Our hair's a little bit different two years ago, but-

And we gained some weights. I have. Yeah.

We don't fit in those suits anymore, so we had to get new suits. But yeah, so fast forward a week after this, and the church went online for over a year.

Yeah. So you can guess what our colleagues did when they heard that we are preaching again together. Some of them left. I think that's why you don't see Scott Dudley in here. Like, "I'm not coming."

Yeah. So we want to set the record straight. People are like, "Oh man, if you guys started a pandemic two years ago, what's going to happen when you guys preach again?" No, no, no. If we started the pandemic, then maybe today, the pandemic's done.

Ends. Ends.

We're just done. Amen.

So we are going over our book of Philippians. And today we are going to read Philippians 2:1-11. And Annie is going to be starting. What are you going to do?

Yeah. I'm going to walk through the verses. And then what are you going to do?

I will be taking us home by talking about how can we live out outside, and I'm going to leave the room for you, and I will be back.

Yeah. She'll be back in a second. So Philippians 2:1-11, "Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain . Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interest of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God's something to be used to his own advantage.

"Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in the appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the father."

So Jesus, we ask that you speak to all of us this morning here in person and those online as Neza and I walk through this passage of what it means and what it means for us today. God, we pray that your voice speaks the loudest. It's in your name that we pray. Amen.

Well, have you ever watched little kids play soccer? I don't even know if we can call it soccer. Maybe we call it bunch ball, where they just all surround the ball and they're all trying to get the ball. Compare that to a professional game of soccer, where every person knows their position and everyone doesn't go for the ball at the same time, but they're all working together to win the game together. This is what Paul is talking about here about the church at Philippi, everybody working together with the same mindset of Christ. In bunch ball, those five year olds, they all have the same mindset: "I want the ball." But they're not working together. And in a professional game of soccer, the players have the same mindset: "Let's win the game." And they work together to achieve that mindset.

So the church is not supposed to be a bunch of five year olds playing bunch ball calling their own shots, but the church is supposed to be a place where we are all in complete unity and agreement about who Jesus is and we work together to share the good news of the gospel. So Paul's talking a lot here about unity, but how is unity possible? How is unity possible in the church with all of our theological differences and maybe our different perspectives and all of our different opinions about everything? We all have different opinions. Paul says that this kind of unity isn't possible if we are focused on ourselves. This unity is only possible if we are focused on something else, Jesus, our Lord and king.

So in the first four verses of Philippians 2, Paul breaks down his call to the church for unity in three ways. He tells us the why for our unity, our motivation for it, and what, what are we supposed to do, and then how, how are we supposed to do that? So we're going to walk through those really quickly.

First, why? What's our motivation for unity? Paul answers this right away in verse 1. "Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion," as brothers and sisters in Christ, we have this encouragement in this unity that Paul's talking about because we agree and are unified that yes, Jesus' love has made a difference in my life, and yes, the spirit helps me and equips me to love as Jesus loves. And yes, that changes my life, and it makes me more compassionate to those around me.

So basically, Paul's saying our motivation for this unity is because we believe in Jesus' love, we believe that it changes us, and it changes us to love one another as Jesus did. And Paul starts there because if we can't agree on that, then we've got much bigger problems ahead of us.

But for some of us here, we may like just be early, early on in discovering who Jesus is. Maybe we're curious about who Jesus is and haven't quite experienced Jesus' love yet. If that's you and you're early on in this journey of walking with Jesus, then I'm going to give you two quick action items. First is pray, "Jesus, show me your love." Just pray that simple prayer. And then second, if you're early on and have questions about Jesus, find anybody with a name badge on today, and let them know that, and talk to somebody about it. So pray and talk to somebody about it.

The why here for unity is fairly straightforward, but when we start unpacking the what and the how, this is where things get a little bit more difficult, so let's proceed. Philippians 2:2, "Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind." So what are we supposed to do? Paul says we are to be like-minded. And again, how are we supposed to do that if we're in such a diverse community with different perspectives and different opinions? Well, Paul, isn't calling us to uniformity, where we all believe the exact same things about every single issue out there, but he's calling us to unity.

And to illustrate this, I'm going to use a silly example of cake versus brownies. This is very important. Cake versus brownies. And I'm using this example, but I want you as a Christian and you as somebody that maybe has had experience with different debates or different issues, just insert that, whatever you are experiencing right now, insert that in the place of this great debate of cake versus brownies. Okay?

So here's my silly example: Isabelle thinks that we should eat cake, and I think that we should eat brownies. And Isabelle and I are reading through Philippians 2, and we see we're supposed to be like-minded, so Isabelle changes her mind and she's like, "Okay, in order to be like-minded, I'm going to get on board with Annie eating brownies." And I do the same thing. I'm like, "Well, in order to be like-minded, I'm going to get on board with Isabelle, and I'm going to get on board with eating cake." But now we're just making this really confusing.

So silly example, but think about it. We have lots of different perspectives in this community, so we could insert anything in there for cake and brownies. This is not the type of like-mindedness that Paul is getting at here though. It's not unity for unity's sake, but it's all about Jesus and unity in Christ. So as brothers and sisters in Christ, we're to be like-minded means that we tether ourselves to Jesus and his gospel message and not have our thinking be out of line with it.

And this means that we can have diversity within our unity, and I don't need to get every single person on board with my agenda of eating brownies. Again, insert any other topic there. But we can have this diversity. Isabelle and I can eat cake and brownies and also know that we both love Jesus. Can I get an Amen. Amen. Okay.

At Bel Pres, we do this so well here. We are a diverse community. We have conservatives here, we have liberals here, but we are all saying, "We are here for Jesus, and those other things that try to divide us, those things are under Jesus because Jesus is our Lord. Jesus is our king." We're a diverse bunch, Bel Pres, but we are not bunch ball Bel Pressers. We are unified in who Jesus is, and we work really hard to put that first, and everything else is a conversation. So as pastor Alexis says, let's keep going. Let's keep moving forward.

Okay. So how? We've done the why, the what, and now the how. How are we to do this? How are we to have this kind of unity and be like-minded? In verses three and four, it says, "Do nothing out of selfless ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interest, but each of you to the interest of others." So how are we to be like-minded and have this kind of unity? We regard others above ourselves. The message version puts it this way: "Don't push your way to the front. Don't sweet talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand."

That's Paul's call to the church at Philippi and to us today, but so often we get this wrong because it's really easy to be self-centered. It's really easy to look out for me, myself, and I, but we got to get beyond that. So here's another example. If I put my own interests aside and I'm focused on Isabelle and helping her and encouraging her and giving her a hand when she needs it and Isabelle sets herself interest aside and she looks out for me and she encourages me and prays for me, which she does, are our needs being met? Yeah. Yeah. They are. They are. They're being met. Having this kind of unity, where we think about ourselves less, it takes trust. It takes trust that somebody is going to look out for me.

And Paul's big point is that's where our joy comes from. When we're not thinking about ourselves all the time, but thinking about others and serving others, that's how we can live this more joy-filled life. We take our eyes off ourselves, we think about others more than ourselves, and we fix our eyes on Jesus.

And Paul closes this section of chapter two with what's known as the Christ hymn because we can look to Jesus as the ultimate example how to live our lives in step with this unity that he calls us to. I'm going to read this, and then I'm going to invite Isabelle to come on up here as I'm reading it because she's going to take it from here. "In your relationships with others, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in the appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the father."

Amen. Amen. Can we give it up for Annie?

Oops. Well, it's a little shorter, but it's okay. Well, I forget to mention to you that I'm in seminary, and that's why I'm doing my internship here. And few of you have asked me, "How is it going so far?" And I have a quick video that summarized my experience. Check it out.

Homework is basically school at home. You doing homework at home when you really supposed to do stuff at school. Ain't school the place to learn? Home is to come from school, chill, get on your tablet, get on a game, what you want to do. But the teachers want to take like 30 minutes of your time, an hour of your time, just to give you homework. They do this to bother you. I don't know why they do that, but that's teachers. All our kids, put your hands up. Hopefully everybody see this video. No more homework! No more homework! Now we out.

I feel this little kid, and all the teachers here, they're going to have to talk to me after, but homework was a lot to me. But guess what I'm going to do right now? I'm going to give you homework. Well, before we go over a practical way to live out the unity that Annie talked about, I'm going to refresh us on what she said. She said that the church is not a bunch of five years old trying to win on their own, but we are a place, and we are the people, that can come together in complete unity and agreement so that we can share the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's who we are, Bel Pres. We are a team. And this team have one goal, and our goal is to look like Jesus every day. Amen. That's our goal.

And in this goal, in this team, we get to play different role. So we are diverse. We can see it. If you look the person next to you or far from you, you will see that they are different than you, but our differences, they're not weakness. Our differences are our strength. Scott Dudley said this when we're doing sermon review. He said that unity is making our differences at work. So without our differences, without your uniqueness, it's hard to be united. So I want all of us to understand that our differences make us united. Amen. So know that you are in a team, in this team, with a great purpose, and without you, we cannot be united as a church. Amen.

So going to some homework, for all the teachers who love homework, this is for you. Our first thing that we can work on as a church in order to strengthen our unity, the first thing is to give grace to ourselves and to others. Honestly, being united is hard, and if we don't give ourself that grace that Jesus or God gave us, it's hard. It's really hard to walk through this without it. Amen. And as we give ourself grace, it's going to be easy to give to others, to expand that grace to others because honestly, we cannot give what we don't possess ourself.

So as we are working and walking into being a united church, it's so important to understand that God's grace to us, we need to give it. When we mess up, we need to remember that we have to give ourself grace and to extend that grace to us because, as you can see on the screen, grace is God working in us through the Holy Spirit to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ, and that grace is needed as we are working through unity. Amen.

The second point that we need to work on is humility. Humility have so many different definition, but as Paul said in verse 6, he said, "Though Jesus was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to." And I love the definition that Tim Killer gave it. He said, "The

essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, but is thinking myself less." Amen. So as we are working into this unity, let's put ourselves, or let's [inaudible 00:18:51] us with humility.

And how does this look like practically? Well, personally, it's thinking about yourself less and taking the time that we take to think about us in our future, our career, and really switch it. Transfer it to think about God, to think about what he's doing in us. Amen. And as a church, how does... I mean, practically, again, personally, it may look like listening to one another, listening, not that we can give our opinion, but listening to understand. It's hard, right? Listening is hard. I struggle with that. But we need that humility. And as a church, humility may look like letting me preach while I'm in my first year of seminary. That's humility. Or Rosalind taking me under her wings over the summer to teach me, as someone who went through seminary as well. Or sometime, humility may look like not taking everything, every matter, so personal, everything that happened. Because we are a big and diverse church, as Annie said, it's easy to take everything and get offended by it, but mostly, we have to understand that humility will help us to not take everything or every matter so personal. Amen.

And as we, still on that part of humility, I want to mention something that humility can help us. So you've seen the style of worship that we have this morning. It's different, right? Most of the time we have so many styles of worship here on every Sunday, and it's so easy to say, "I worship better than you do worship," or, "My way or my style of worship, it's better than yours." Not to say that Bel Pres, we struggle with this, but it's easy to find ourselves in it. So when we find ourselves in it, what humility will... the role that humility will play is to sit with a person who is praising or worshipping differently than you and ask a question, "Why do you worship in this style? Tell me more about it." And as we understand one another, it will be easier to understand that our way of worship may be different, but the person that we worship is bigger than our differences. Amen.

And on that point, we get to understand that we can agree to disagree on how we worship, but not on who we worship. That was Annie's quote, so I'm giving her credit. And we can say worship, it's simple. How about other disagreement that we have back in our homes or in the society? The first thing we can do is to attack those disagreements with humility. You will be amazed of the unity that we can get when we walk with humility. Amen. So think of the disagreement that you have outside of the church, and put yourself and [inaudible 00:22:20] yourself with humility. You will be amazed to see that what divides us are temporary things, things that cannot even matter a hundred years from now, but what unites us, it's eternal thing: God, Jesus, and what we are going to live in eternally. Amen. Humility is so important.

The last point on how we can work for us to accomplish this strong unity is living sacrificially. Bel Pres, we are good at that. We serve. We give our money. We... I don't know, you name it. We are good in living sacrificially, but above that, I would love us to know something else. Living sacrificially may also mean to surrender ourselves to God, not only serving, but surrender

everything that we are to him. And as we surrender ourselves, we are giving God permission to use us. We are giving him permission to interrupt us in our daily lives and say, "I'm available for you. Use me." Amen. And as we are surrounding to him, he will get to use us through our days. Living sacrificially also may mean, as we worship in here, after service, saying hi to somebody that you don't know. We will be so amazed to see what God is doing in us and through us as we are living sacrificially as a church. Quick story on what God is doing in our church from us living sacrificially. It's a guy by the name of Joswel. Joswel is from the Congo. He went to college here and got a job at Microsoft, so he moved here, and two months ago, I met him. Guess what? We went to the same school with Joswel. Isn't that amazing?

How did Joswel end up here? It's because this church living sacrificially. Joswel came in here. Two weeks in here, people will stop and start greeting him, and he will be like, "This is the church that I want to be part of." And he get to hear Scott Dudley share about the Congo team and what they are doing, and he said, "I'm going to sit and be part of this church." Not only us living sacrificially made room for someone as Joswel to find home in here, but also, Joswel is living this life by trying to mentor our middle school and high school. So we are making room for people, but also they're not being just sitting, but they're being transformed and want to live sacrificially, as well.

So Bel Pres, let's take this week, or for the rest of our lives, take some moment or some times to pray this prayer every morning: "God, we surrender ourself to you. I surrender my schedule to you. Interrupt me and do what you want to do through me." Amen.

Actually, let's try it. We don't have the prayer there, but let's all say, "God, I surrender myself to you." Amen.

So Jesus, thank you. Thank you that you are working in us and through us. Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you will teach us to give grace to ourselves, that you will teach us to work in humility, but that you will teach us, as well, to surrender our lives, our family, our schedule to you so that we can be used by you. It's in your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Read Phil 2:1-4. Paul is calling the church to unity. How do you understand having diversity within unity (e.g. you vote one way, and your friend votes another way, but you both love Jesus)? Why do you think Paul calls us to unity and not uniformity?
- Read Phil 2:5-11. As we are called to imitate Christ, what aspects are hardest for you? Which come more naturally?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.