

## Title: “Unity Through the Power of God”

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1 Cor. 2:5

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**Service Readings:** Is. 58:3-9a, 1 Cor. 2:1-16, Matt 5:13-20

*The church at Corinth sought unity. We seek the same thing. And it is realized within us, individually and as a church body, through the power of God.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses a sickness that has infected this church body. They had once been healthy, unified as if a single body with Christ as its head. Each member recognized the spiritual gifts that had been given to them by God and they used these gifts to serve each other and serve the world around them. Some were teachers, some were healers. Others were preachers and still others administrators. They built each other up, supported each other, and served one another; and they did it all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But something happened. A disease invaded and spread throughout this body and now it was critically ill. Incestuous relationships, lawsuits, and disagreements weakened it to a point where the life of this church was in mortal danger. Some in the church recognized this diagnosis and so turned to Paul for intervention. They called on him as they would a doctor, pleading that he would restore this church body back to health, unifying the divisions and finding the unity that had been lost.

But Paul doesn't respond the way that they expect. He doesn't offer his hands or his head. He informs them that he is the wrong surgeon for this job for he has neither the power nor the wisdom to bring about its healing. But he does not leave them empty handed; he offers them the only thing that *will* restore them to health. He offers them the power of God. He writes:

2 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. <sup>2</sup>For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup>And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, <sup>4</sup>and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup>so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

The power of God. This is what he brought them on his initial visit and this is what he offers them in their time of desperation: the power of God. It is this power, and this power alone that can restore the unity that has been lost and is threatening the life of this church. His message is clear to them: the only way to health is to recover this unity and the only way to recover this unity is through the power of God.

Or to put it a different way: the goal of this body is unity and the medicine is the power of God. This seems backwards to the world for who would strive for unity over power? Wouldn't we want power? Wouldn't that bring stronger health than unity ever could? Look across the world today; is

there ever a person who judges another as being “unity hungry?” Of course not! We thirst for power, not unity! And Paul points this out to them. In example after example he shows them where they are chasing after power in one form or another and he tells them that what they should be chasing after is unity. And he informs them that the *only* way to unity is with the medicine that God offers through his infinite power. Unity. That is what this letter is all about.

Unity. That is what Jesus was all about. His earthly life, his sacrificial death, his resurrection from the dead was never about power – it was always about unity. Here’s what I mean:

We look to the Trinity and see perfect unity in the three persons of one God. It is a relationship that is incomprehensible to us but one that is perfect in every way. There is no power struggle between the three but only unity. And the outpouring of that unity, the fruit of that unity is one of perfect service between each of them.

And when God created man, there was a unity that was a shadow of that trinitarian unity. Man was harmoniously united with God. God served man and man served God. But when that unity ended so did the fruits of service. Unity as a goal was replaced with power as its telos, its ultimate aim, and the fruits changed as well. No longer did we live to serve each other and God, but we lived to serve ourselves.

But through the power of God that unity was restored. The Father sent his Son. His son became a sinner for us and underwent God’s full judgement and was resurrected on the third day. But this transfer of victory, this miracle of new life, would be of no value to us without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into the bodies of the disciples on that Pentecost Sunday and at our own baptisms. It is *this* unity, the one that takes place between the Holy Spirit and us that brings us into unity with the death and resurrection of Jesus. And it is *this* unity in the death and resurrection of Jesus that restores the *unity* between us and God – a unity that was lost in the first garden.

You see? It is not the power of God that we desire but the *unity* that it brings. For through this unity we can now serve and love God. And this plays out through our service and love for others. *This* is the message of unity that Paul is driving at in his letter and it could have been written to us, even today. The symptoms might be different but the diagnosis is the same. We look around at the world in which we live and what do we see? We see division at every turn: in our political systems, in our societies, in our families, and even in our churches. And we even see it here at St. Mark. Our symptoms might be different than that of the Corinthian church but the disease is still the same. Have you ever been selfish? Judgmental? What about condescending to those less fortunate than you? Or maybe you just don’t have empathy for *those* people over there. All of these foster division and tear down unity: in the world, and as the body of Christ.

You see, each one of us is in need of this healing power of God – not just for the unity that it brings to us individually in Jesus Christ, but for the unity that it brings to us in the whole body of the church. And so this morning we call out to the Holy Spirit to rekindle in us the fire of faith that was ignited in our baptism for we desire nothing more than unity – with God and with each other. And we desire nothing more than to know Jesus Christ and him crucified. For through the blood of his sacrifice we find unity with our God.

Please pray with me.

Lord, my Way Maker, You have saved us and have called out people from every part of the globe.

We pray for unity between all Christians. As persecutions, troubles, and dangers come, may the saints be aware of how they can pray, love, and support one another. Our bond in Christ transcends cultures, borders, and nationalities: we have a citizenship in heaven. As such, we pray for unity across all believers as we seek to proclaim You to the nations. Amen.