

Sermon Romans 15 4 13 2nd Sunday in Advent Series A

Sermon: 2nd Sunday in Advent

Text: Romans 15:4-13 (vv.5, 6)

Theme: Unity in the Church

Goal: To highlight God's will of unity in the church in spite of our differences

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We have a mixed of people in our congregation, and we are not like some of the traditional churches where most of the people have the same background and grew together since they were born. We have people who came from different provinces in South Africa; we have people who came from different countries: from Australia, from Germany, from the USA, from Brazil... from where more? I think very few are Capetonians. We have people from different backgrounds, from different traditions and from different experiences, young and old, males and females.

What brings us together to be seated Sunday after Sunday in these chairs? The same Grace of God has called us to faith in Jesus, and we all partake from the same forgiveness offered by God through His Word in the Holy Absolution and in the Holy Communion. This gives us a spirit of unity that surpasses all human efforts of peace and reconciliation. The unity of the Holy Christian church is something unique because it comes from God!

But even so, from times to times the unity of the church is shaken, sometimes by strong personalities, other times by issues involving traditions, customs, finances... How many different churches are just inside the Christian Church?

Paul warns in our text against selfish divisions and makes a huge appeal for unity in the church! As Christmas Season is a time that

proclaims reconciliation and peace, and when families come together to celebrate Christmas, let's talk about the true unity that comes from God in His Son Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### I – The Scripture

Paul refers to the example of the Scriptures and makes a strong statement about the goal of the Scripture in our personal lives and in the life of the church: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” He was talking about the relationship between weak and strong Christians, between Jews and Gentiles. We have to search in the Scriptures and see how selfishness and lack of unity had weakened the church in the past.

The big positive example Paul mentions is Jesus, when he says: “For even Christ did not please Himself,” – this means: He was not selfish neither did He fought for His own interest, as we do it sometimes. For the good of all humanity and to conquer reconciliation to God, Jesus didn't react when he was insulted by the Jews and soldiers and eventually was hang on the cross. His endurance and encouragement shall give us hope and strength to live in unity for the good of the church and for the glory of God.

The role of the Scripture in the Advent Season is highlighted when we say that Advent reminds us: 1<sup>st</sup>) that Jesus came once as a child in Bethlehem; 2<sup>nd</sup>) that Jesus comes regularly in His Word and in the Sacraments; 3<sup>rd</sup>) that He will come again in glory at the end of the days. We have to have the Scriptures in high value in our lives because it is through it that Jesus comes to us and that God communicates with us.

II – Jesus accepted us

Paul's second argument on the unity of the church is based on Christ's example when he accepted us: "Accept one another just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." If Christ accepts people from all different background, colour, age, gender, tribe, race, language – and whatever more differences there can be, - why should we don't accept one another because of our differences?

I know that South Africa has a long history of discrimination. I realized this strongly when I was in Johannesburg last week. The manager of the Lutheran Hour introduced me to several churches and he always mentioned: this is a black church, this is a coloured church, this is a white church... But this is part of the past. I agree when some of you said: *Pastor we grew up this way. It's difficult to change our mind.* It takes time. But we have to be aware that there are no boundaries in the Kingdom of God: whoever God calls to faith in Jesus is a citizen of His Kingdom. *We have no right to reject others because Christ Himself has accepted us as we are, with our weaknesses...Our model is Christ, who accepted us unconditionally. In dealing with one another in the community of believers, especially when trying to find solutions to issues that divide us, we must take Christ as our example...*

The Africa Bible Commentary says: *"When Jews and Gentiles, strong and weak, and men and women from different races and tribes can unite in Christ and glorify God, unbelievers are amazed and say, 'If such different people can be so united, their God must mean a lot to them.'* - *Believers, let us set aside our differences and proclaim the love of Christ through our unity. Our differences were meant to glorify God and not to tear us apart.* (ABC 1374).

### III – United to glorify God

When we come together in our diversity, this is a strong sign of our unity. Paul says: “So that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Like as a choir sings in different voices, but in a beautiful harmony, so is our worship. *The prayers and worship of believers united in heart is sweet music in the ears of God.* (ABC 1374).

Unity is essential to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It is called also “Holy Communion” to express that all who come to the altar have the same faith. Therefore we are putting on the screen what we believe, to remind everyone that the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is given in, with and under the bread and wine, for forgiveness of our sins. If someone doesn’t believe this and has doubts about what really the Lord’s Supper is and what it offers, he/she should abstain from the Lord’s Supper till he/she speaks with the pastor to be sure that he/she will receive the Holy Communion with all its benefits.

Conclusion: Paul wishes us two blessings in this text. The first one is: “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a **spirit of unity** among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with **one heart** and **one voice** you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” - The second one is: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” As we are preparing ourselves to celebrate Christmas, the feast of peace and reconciliation, let us be strengthened in our unity and faith by God’s Word and the Sacrament, doing all efforts to refrain our selfish instinct, and searching always for God’s will in our personal lives and in the life of our congregation. Amen.