

All Around the Altar Service

6th September 2020 - Unity of the Spirit

Unity of the Spirit - Our community

Our theme this morning is Unity of the Spirit - our community, I would like us to reflect on the following themes:

Relationships

Everyone has a purpose within our community of Christ

Being united as a community of believers by Gods Holy Spirit

Taking on the nature of God

Maintaining community in a new phase of church

And we'll be exploring the examples in the books of Acts, Romans and Ephesians

Please also find an activity for families to look at together whilst listening to our talk this morning.

However firstly I am going to light a BBQ, when you light a BBQ there is a reason, a purpose and it's usually to cook food. If it's a fire pit then you light the fuel to create warmth - there is a purpose and a reason for lighting the fuel. As you can see I have created a small pile of coals- placing them closely together and as I light the fire lighter within the coals a reaction happens.

It's really important that the coals are joined together, they are placed together for the chain reaction, to catch light to each other, feed each other, to generate more warmth and be more useful for their purpose. For a few moments reflect on being together as a church, a community a unity of God's people. What is it that occurs, what purpose or reaction happens when we are placed together like these BBQ coals. I realise that in our current circumstances we are limited on how we can be together in a physical form but what about our spiritual togetherness built and created by God for his purpose.

We'll explore more together following our reading read by Duncan.

Main Talk

The coals have continued to burn and we'll take a look a little later but lets think about and explore being community as God intended. A unity of the Spirit. In Ephesians chapters 1-3 Paul outlines the blessings associated with being a child of

God, when we reach chapter 4 - our reading today Paul outlines the responsibility of being a child of God. To be in unity with one another in Christ. There is a strong emphasis on relationships, how to act, us all having a purpose and more importantly a unity by the Holy Spirit.

As a congregation, a community of faith we are having to work harder on those relationships due to having to be distant from one another. Ian Barclay encourages people to emphasis the ONE preceding body, spirit, Lord, baptism etc. ONE body, ONE mind, ONE spirit etc. He says the emphasis is not the diversity of the gift but the fact that all believers share them.

So back to our burning coals... you'll see that by leaving them for a while the flames have died down but the coals themselves are very hot and ready for the intended purpose, however if I move one to the side on its own it may not be so effective, we'll see a little later - reflect how effective is that single coal? If the coal represents us as a Christian how effective would we be out there on our own? Just for a moment or two reflect how would you feel if you were that coal of to the side?? Through recent months you may feel you are that coal on the side, there but not really there? If you're gathered with family you may want to pause and share your thoughts together.

One of the best examples of living as a community of believers is in Acts chapter 2 and chapter 4. In chapter 2 it tells *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common."* And later in chapter 4 it says they are still living in fellowship *"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."*

In Romans 12:4-5 it says *"Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other"*

How fantastic is that we are many parts of the one body and we all belong to each other. I think that's pretty amazing from our very youngest member only born in recent weeks to members of the congregation who have faithfully lived as servants of Christ for many many years - there is a purpose for everyone and we all belong to each other even in times like we are currently in - we belong to each other.

Belonging to each other takes commitment and being joined together by the Holy Spirit in unity. It says in our reading from Ephesians *“we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together”*

Back to our BBQ - see how the coal on its own has started to dwindle and lose its heat, it's lost its purpose of being part of the whole, being more effective for its purpose - it needed to be with the whole community of coals.

Reflect or share for a moment what does the word community mean to you? What is community?

The short answer is that the word “community” is a compound word; “com” means with and “unity” means what the word says...unity or being unified or having a common union. In short, God wants believers to dwell in union and in community having the same mind that is in Jesus Christ. So despite our congregation, our family where everyone is belonging is physically distant at the moment, spiritually we need to work on having the same mind that is in Jesus Christ. For it is through being bound in the unity of the spirit we are still our congregation, still our community of believers that belong to each other. By taking on the nature of Christ we are still our congregation, our community belonging to each other despite not being in a physical presence as we once were.

Over the next few weeks there will be an opportunity for some to meet physically on Sunday mornings - socially distant of course and there are the other opportunities for fellowship and community through the online prayer group chat, bible study groups and the forthcoming online alpha course. Yes it is different and may not be our preferred way of worship and community but God knows our struggles with our circumstances at the moment; but He also delights when we fully recognise him and take on his nature which binds us together in the unity of him.

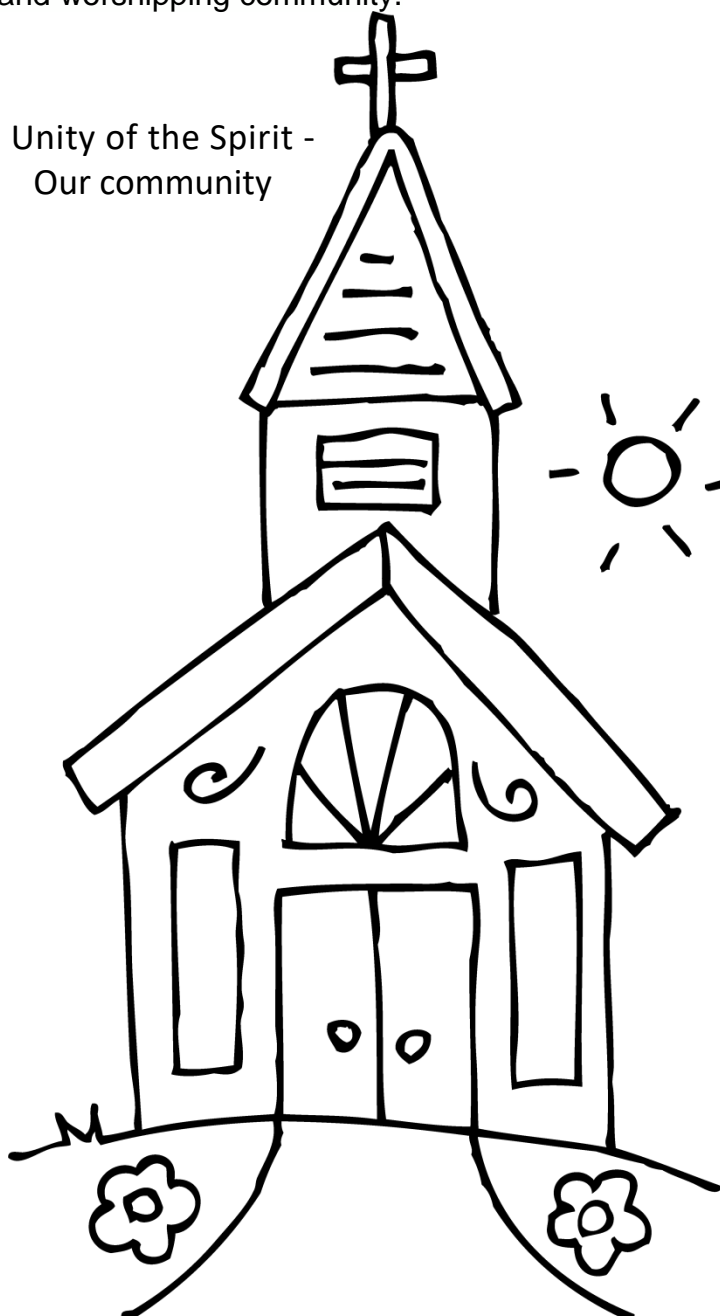
And as I place the individual coal back where it belongs, we recognise that our new way of being church and maintaining our community takes effort and commitment but we are a community of believers who belong to each other, we all have a purpose with him at the center, let us be fueled up, for Christs purpose and mission unified by him and we pray that at some stage we will have a BBQ together to celebrate being a community through and in Christ.

Amen.

Activity Sheet

Resources: The church picture below printed, a glue stick, scissors, plain/coloured paper, coloring pens/pencils

1. Place a plain piece of paper behind the printed sheet and glue on 3 sides, leaving the bottom side unstuck.
2. With the scissors cut open the doors on 3 sides - across the bottom, up the middle and across the top but leaving the side lines so you can open the doors and see the blank sheet of paper underneath.
3. Draw members of our congregation/community within the church and down the path, representing us belonging to each other and united by Christ.
4. Place this up within your home to remember to pray for members of our fellowship and worshipping community.



Try to write words beginning with each letter that represents our church and belonging in unity together.

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