

God Unites

God Can: Part 3 “God Unites”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – November 6, 2022

All Saints Sunday

Readings: Ephesians 1:11-23; John 17:11-24

Reflection: Psalm 121

Greeting: Let us love each other, because love is from God. Everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. God’s love is revealed to us through his only Son. Christ came to the world that we could live through him! *(1 John 4)*

Prayer: O God, our guide and our guardian, we humbly enter into your presence. May we be blessed by your grace and your love as we join together to worship you this day. May we grow in heart and mind with you, Lord. May you lift us up and strengthen us by your righteousness and your steadfast faithfulness. Help us to be bold in our faith so that we may do your will joyfully and eagerly. May we worship you in a spirit of truth, that we may follow you all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. (Psalm 121 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 121 and we hear of seeking God for help. That the Lord watches over his people. The Lord will keep us and protect us. That we are united in God’s constant vigil over us. How do you reach out to God when you are in need? Do you take comfort knowing that God is watching over you? Do you place your complete trust in Christ’s redeeming grace? Do you share that grace and extend that invitation to others? How does it change your life knowing God will always be with us? How can we share in the love that unites us from this life to the next?

Prayer: O God, your steadfast love and faithfulness have brought us together this day. Help us to live by your grace and mercy always. May we share in the hope you have inspired in us and may we share always in your blessing. We ask that as we come before you with our joys and our concerns that you will strengthen us by your spirit. As you are with us in our celebrations and sorrows, may you lift us up in both our laughter and tears. May your light guide us and lead us to life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Ephesians chapter 1 verses 11 through 23.

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.
(Ephesians 1:11-23 NRSV*)

Our next reading for today comes from John chapter 17 verses 11 through 24.

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. "I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:11-24 NRSV*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This So, this week we look at the way that God unites us. As we think about All Saints Sunday, we remember those who have completed their journey in faith. We also remember the way that we are all united in God's great love for his people. Part of the reason I chose this for today is because I think there is a great comfort in knowing that God unites his people. Our life in Christ transcends the normal boundaries that we would think of. Because we are never divided in Christ but are united in love. A love that goes beyond the boundaries even of life and death. And it can be difficult when we discuss those who have died. It is often the elephant in the room. It's an uncomfortable subject. It is always there, and it is the greatest unknown that we face. We have a tendency to fear the unknown. And that fear and worry can run deep. But what I do know is that we have gained something that goes well beyond this life. We have an inheritance in Christ.

Paul talks about this in Ephesians. He discusses faith in Christ and the love that those in Ephesus have toward all the saints. Those who are still with us and those who have gone on before. And on this day, I think about that kind of love. A love that we find in Christ that unites us through even death. A love that is there beyond any simple notions of love that we may have. It goes beyond a love of things, a love of a moment, or any fleeting love. It is a love bound to hope, founded in compassion. It is a promise that Christ is always with us, and we are always in Christ. We are invited into that life of love. Not that we would occasionally experience it, but that it would be a constant in our lives. And because it is a constant in our lives, we are never far from it. And if we are never far from that love, we are never far from each other. That the saints are bound together in hope through Jesus Christ our Lord. That Christ is above all things, and therefore can unite us in all things. Not today, not yesterday, not tomorrow, but for all time.

And we hear it when Christ speaks in our reading from John. That Christ asks that joy be made complete in us. And we get an enigmatic phrase that we do not belong to the world. Just as Christ is sent into the world, we are sent into the world. We are sanctified in truth that we may be as one in Christ. That we are not bound by worldly desires. We do not have to give in to those things that we use to lift ourselves up to glorify ourselves, such as our desires for power and wealth. We have been freed in Christ. We are not called to seek our own glory but to seek the glory of God. That we are made complete in Christ. We find unity in God's love that is from everlasting to everlasting. That we experience a bond that is far greater than anything else we could know. It's the love that binds us together for all time. It moves beyond what we can see and what we can hear. It goes beyond all things known and unknown. That we are made complete in that love. We are united under God's steadfast love that endures forever. That because of that love, we are bound together and can never be separated.

This is the hope that we share. This is the promise that has been made. That as we live in Christ, we die in Christ. That as we die in Christ we are raised in Christ. That if Christ died to conquer death and rose to conquer sin, that we are set free from slavery to sin and death. It is there, in that freedom that we find the freedom to love. It is there in that freedom that we find the freedom to forgive. It is there in the freedom that Christ gives us that we find the freedom to care. We find that we are free from envy and greed and strife when we trust that we are united

in Christ. And it means that nothing can separate us. Not arguments, not war, not hardship, not famine, not distress, not pain, not even death. That we are forever united in a bond in our Savior. And because of that bond, we never truly say goodbye, but we go from glory to glory. And this gives me comfort. Comfort in grief. Because there still is grief. We still experience the loss from death, because we are still separated by time. Because it does change our time here. Because the lives lived are part of our lives, and that pain is all too real. But we are not separated in love. Part of that comfort is knowing that when I speak of us being united in Christ, that we are of one body redeemed by one blood, that I mean that we are all of one body. That I speak of those who have come before and those who will come after us. That we are united as one. When I say we are redeemed by one blood, that we are all washed clean in the blood of the lamb, it is that Christ has opened the door to salvation for all who have come before and all who will come after through his great and enduring love. And that because of that love we are bound together in hope.

But I want to make sure that we understand our relationship in Christ. Because we can get too wrapped up in thinking that our inheritance is all in the life to come. That everything that we have been promised is for that life beyond this life. And that just isn't the case. The gift that we have in Christ's love is for this life and the next. The mercy that we have been shown is for this life and the next. Christ specifically says that he doesn't want us taken out of this world, but that we are sent into the world to share that love and mercy. The reward isn't simply a reward that comes in the next life, but it is a reward that we experience in this life and the next. It is an ongoing joy. Not that we are united as those who are patiently waiting and those who have received, but we are united all as those who have received God's grace and God's mercy. We are united as all those who have experienced Christ's great love. We are united as those who have been redeemed, not just in some far future time but today, here and now. We celebrate those who have finished their labors in this life, and we celebrate with those who are still journeying in this life. Because our faith isn't about a far-off reward coming someday, but that it is about a life lived in Christ.

Because we are loved, and we are forgiven. And that is a forgiveness that unites us in love. It unites us in grace. It unites us in mercy. Because as we experience that grace, we share that grace. And as we share that grace, we work to make God's Kingdom here on earth just as it is in heaven. Not simply looking for the strength to endure, but the strength to change. Not looking for the strength to hold on until that day comes but looking for the strength that we may try to make that day today. That we learn the lessons that we have learned from all those who have gone before. We carry with us the hope that has been built up from generation to generation that instills in us and even greater hope in our God. And as we remember those who have gone before, we think about the message we send to those who come after. Not that we simply endured. Not that we simply waited patiently. But that we embraced that gift of unity that God has given us, and we embraced it so that we may show love, that we may share grace, that we may forgive. So that all may know love in this life and the next. That all may know mercy in this life and the next. And that all may know that we are united in one great love in Christ Jesus our Savior. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We are in Christ and Christ is in

us. And because of that we will always have hope. And may God unite in hope, love, and peace forevermore. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – God Can

Our current series is a look at the ways that God is a part of our lives, and all that God can do. We will spend five weeks exploring the ways that God acts. In them, we will see the ways God responds to us and how we can respond to God.

October 23rd – *God Adapts* – Exodus 3:7-12; 4:1-17

October 30th – *God Hears* – 2 Kings 20:1-7; Luke 11:5-13

November 6th – *God Unites* – Ephesians 1:11-23; John 17:11-24

November 13th – *God Loves* – Zephaniah 3:14-20; Romans 5:1-11

November 20th – *God Provides* – 1 Chronicles 29:9-18; Matthew 11:25-30

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Family of Susie Callahan
Kenny Holmes	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter
Jeremy Klinger	Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Family of Tracy Huddleston
Family of Mary Bayless	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Dean Carlen
Ross Maddison	Family of Sue Comer	Richard Durham	Carol Miller
Kyle Lehman	Kathy Hanks	Family of Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson	Nick & Leana Ochoa
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Kristen & Zach Morecraft	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte		

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