

Keep the Unity of the Spirit

In Scripture, we are reminded to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with humility and gentleness and patience. We are reminded to bear one another in love, to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Paul writes how there is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all (Eph. 4:1–6).

In the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed we confess our belief that the work of the Holy Spirit is to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify the Christian Church on earth and preserve it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith. The Holy Spirit leads the believer's personal endeavor of faith: our life, our speech and actions. The Spirit instructs us to walk in the light, as God is in the light. In doing so we are drawn together in close fellowship one with another in the body of Christ, the congregation of God (1 John 1:17).

The Gospel is the Power of God

Though we are one in faith and spirit, God's children carry the same sin-corruption as all people do. We fall into sin and need the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). We live of the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation to everyone that believes (Rom. 1:16). If we neglect its use in caring for our faith, it has sad results. Sin can eventually separate us from God and His children.

The experience of God's children shows that our adversary, the devil, not only works diligently to cause us to fall into sin but wants to also destroy our unity and peace and cause division. Differences can easily arise in a family or between any of God's children. The gospel of the forgiveness of sins is the remedy as long as all remain humble and desire to live of the gospel. When offenses and differences are cared for with the blood of Christ, unity returns which brings joy.

Caring for Faith

In caring for our faith God has given us His Word, which we can read and study and from which we find comfort and instruction. At the services and in the fellowship of God's children, we receive nourishment and instruction for our faith. We are in a secure place when we remain in the care of God's congregation.

Prayer is another precious gift God has given us. It is speech of the heart with God. Songs and hymns of Zion also comfort and teach us. James writes of the care of God for His own: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (James 5:13–15).

Dear brothers and sisters in faith, we are the most fortunate of all people when we have the precious gift of faith and dwell in God's kingdom where we are loved and cared for with the gospel, the glad tidings of Christ: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).

Don Lahti

Row This Way, Homeward

"Now we are in heaven," muses Paula on Easter Saturday. "There they are sleeping." This is the caption my mother's sister wrote underneath a photo in an album I hold open. The photo is black and white, the album is from my childhood home. The photo shows me, a two-year-old, with my siblings and aunt standing before the graves of my mother and brother Kari in Haukipudas, Finland. It is Easter Sunday in 1956. Our human minds tell us they were called to heaven too early.

"I remember well that Christmassy St. Stephen's Day morning," my older sister says. "Mother was quickly trying to get herself ready to go, the children at her heels. We followed closely the goings-on of her departure, and I remember how Mother blessed us as she was leaving."

Miraculous Unity of Saints

Mother's blessing thoughts and hands have carried me through the decades. It is an incomprehensible gift to have been born into a home where Christian values were honored.

In one writing, my father remembered: *The words that Mother left with us and her love have been like gold on the path of life. It is a love that will never disappear. It's a miraculous unity of saints that exists between the rejoicing and the battling congregation. As a great invisible cloud of witnesses, those who have slept away in faith surround us. They say to us from there: "Row this way, here, after all, is the real home."*

Though they felt lacking, my parents sowed the seed, endeavored and looked forward with eyes of faith. We are still on the journey toward the same goal.

Fair is creation, beautiful God's heaven,

Wondrous the path our souls are on.

All through creation, we travel singing;

As heavenward our pathway wends.

(translated by M. Keranen from *Maa on niin kaunis*, Finnish hymn 30, verse one).

The day after Christmas, Mother sang this hymn in the church choir. It was her last song on this earth. On the evening of the same day she was able to move from time to eternity with her firstborn son. The words of the song and its melody have traveled with me. They come alive again and again and bring a view of hope amidst everyday life and in celebration.

I pause in my thoughts to ponder: how does a two-year-old small girl live the reality of the unity of saints? She does not doubt. Trustingly she thinks that her mother and her big brother are now in heaven. How comforting. She knows that heaven is her goal as well.

Paula Petaisto

A Kingdom of Unity

We live far from other believers in a very small congregation in Rolla, North Dakota. We often feel lonely and long for fellowship with God's children. Though we are happy to be surrounded by friends, community members and dear family members, the unity of the Spirit is lacking.

We are fortunate to have services in our area several times a year, and we look forward to these times. Services are sometimes held with those we may have never personally met before. However, when we come face to face and share the greeting of God's Peace, immediately the Spirit unites us. This unity of the Holy Spirit is something those without faith cannot comprehend.

How do you explain when someone asks how we can so freely talk to our brothers and sisters in faith about matters that may trouble us? Or when they ask how we can welcome new friends in faith so freely into our homes, even if we've never met before? Words cannot describe this unity that we have. God's kingdom is a kingdom of spiritual unity.

Some years ago, I attended Phoenix Winter Services with my husband, who is not believing. He had arranged the trip for us as his Christmas gift to me. When we attended the services, he couldn't understand how freely everyone greeted and welcomed us. He asked me how I knew everyone. I replied that I didn't personally know everyone, but we shared a common bond of living faith. This was a mystery to him.

Over the years we have attended Winter Services several times. Each time he has made new and good friends he enjoys visiting with so much. My prayer has always been that God will also grant him the grace of repentance.

God allowed me to experience this when after a troubling circumstance, my husband approached me and asked me to forgive him his sins. I freely preached the gospel to him, and for a time I experienced not only unity of marriage, which we have shared, but also the unity of the Holy Spirit. There are no

words to describe this. Marriage unites two people, but it can never compare to the unity of the Holy Spirit. Such a wonderful kingdom we reside in.

Hold fast “for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37).

Bonnie Bercier

The Red Thread

The red thread that ties me
to my grandmother’s grandmother
flows with the blood of Jesus,
pulling me to the shore of heaven.

There she waits, along with my child,
and those others I dearly miss.
I didn’t know her on this earth,
or the multitudes that wait with her.

On my shoulder, the tempter whispers:
Was their faith truly the same as yours?
Satan snaps his scissors sharp,
waiting to sever a fragile thread.

I trust! I trust the good report of their faith;
their testimony is passed along
the red thread that unites believers
across the boundaries of time.

It is the same red thread uniting me
with those here who trust in the living gospel;
The ones I love, near and far,
and the ones I love, but don’t know by name.

It is the same red thread uniting me,
I pray, to the children of my grandchildren,

and to those multitudes of believers
yet to be born, yet to be called.

The red thread is my lifeline
flowing with the blood of Jesus,
bringing me a two-fold blessing:
Life and hope of heaven.

Janelle Huhta, 2019

Discussion Points

1. What spirit governs a believer's life, and how is this seen or revealed?
2. What is unity? How do we know or sense there is unity among us?
3. When should the gospel be used, and how has it helped you in your life of faith?
4. Share about the power of prayer in your life.