# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Our Unity in the Spirit”**

**Ephesians 4:1-6**

 **October 17, 2021**

Our current sermon series is on the Holy Spirit whose work is to bring us into the life of God so that our lives become like God’s life. We have used the illustration of God’s life as a circle of three persons holding hands, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s work is to bring us into the circle, to bring us into God’s life, and there to transform our character so that it becomes more and more like the character of God. These past several weeks we have spoken of the fruit of the Spirit, the ways in which our individual inner lives are becoming like God’s as the Spirit cultivates patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness within us. Today we begin a four-week look at the Spirit’s work among us as a family of faith, as the community we call Congregational-Presbyterian Church. This morning’s topic is the Spirit at work among us bringing about unity.

There is an old saying that goes: “To dwell above with saints we love, oh that will be glory; but to dwell below with saints we know, well, that’s another story.” Christian unity is difficult because we Christians sometimes have a hard time getting along with each other. But, our life together as a congregation, as a family of faith, is a gift from God and with this gift of community comes the responsibility to take good care of it.

When I was ten years old, my parents gave me the gift of a bicycle. With the gift came responsibility. “Don’t leave your bike out in the rain.” “Be sure to lock it up at school.” “Why is your bike lying in our neighbor’s yard?” All ways of saying, “Take care of your gift.”

God has given us the gift of this church community and to be good stewards of our church means to take good care of it. How do we do that? We do it first of all by being committed to unity. I invite you to turn with me to Ephesians 4:1-6

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

In this passage, Paul gives us our stewardship assignment: take good care of God’s gift of the church by being committed to one another. As a pastor I counsel couples who are struggling in their marriage, and I often ask them to consider the difference between taking a personal position and having a shared interest. While a personal position is based on me getting what I want, with little or no regard for what you want, a shared interest seeks to find a way for both of us to be content. For us to be united as a congregation, we must always be seeking to promote shared interests rather than personal positions. Humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness are all ways of being with each other that will encourage the unity of shared interests. Because of our love for God, we commit ourselves to the well-being of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

These past several years have seen an increase in disunity in our society. Whether its politics, masks, or vaccines, we have become increasingly fractured as a nation. Yet, in our church, we have not allowed those fractures to define us. While we certainly have our differences as individuals, we have not made them the center-piece of our congregation. We have sought to promote shared interests rather than personal positions, and I am grateful to every one of you for your effort to maintain the unity of peace that has for many years characterized this family of faith. The care for one another that we have maintained in an increasingly hostile world is one of the many reasons why I am confident to be able to say to you that the Spirit of God is at work among us.

In verses four through six, Paul lists seven things that we all have in common in Christ. We are not a community because of who we are in terms of our human traits. We are not united in Christ because we look alike, or come from the same socio-economic background, or have the same political outlook, or any other human factor that causes people to group together. What we have in common comes from God and are his gifts to us – we are one body of believers, we are given one Holy Spirit, we have one glorious hope for the future, we honor one Lord, we practice one faith, we participate in one baptism, we worship one God and Father of all. Our unity has its basis in these gifts of God, and our stewardship assignment is to take good care of that unity. We do so when we are committed to one another: humbly, gently, patiently, lovingly and peacefully.