

From space we get a spectacular view of the world in which we live. This big blue ball with its turquoise expanse of seas, the swirling clouds, the whorl of ocean currents, the snow-topped polar caps to the creamy taupe of the Sahara desert is a spectacular sight against the black expanse of the heavens. From the heavens you can only see what God has made, except for one thing that we have made- a wall- The Great Wall of China.

That human beings have made walls should come as no surprise to any of us. Walls are important. Walls serve to define us and to defend us. The walls that we have constructed here at Linglestown Life will help us to define our ministry and provide a place where the weary and worn can find rest and peace.

But walls can also separate us; not just physically but in many other ways as well. People in general are expert wall builders. We have erected walls based on race, politics and economics to mention but a few. Sadly, the church has even had a part in erecting those walls that divide people.

And if we are not careful these newly constructed walls can also separate us.

If we let the walls hem us in; they can separate us from the community that we have been called to go into and reach with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

And these walls, if we let them, can also separate us as a church if we are not careful to remember that while we worship in different spaces and in different ways that we are still one church, with one mission, bound by one prayer.

In our scripture lesson this morning we see that God is in the business of breaking down walls that divide his people and restoring unity to the body of Christ. During the next several weeks this idea of unity in the church will be the focus of our messages as we seek to understand how our unity at Linglestown Life is vital to fulfilling our mission. Each week we will unpack this theme of One Church, One Mission, One Prayer so that together we can see God do some spectacular things in and through Linglestown Life. But before we talk about unity in the body of Christ; we need to remember that God first wants to break down the wall that separates us from Him. Earlier in Ephesians Paul spoke of a dividing wall that Jesus came to break so that we might be united to God.

If we are to be united as the body of Christ it begins with us being reunited with God. When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior that wall of sin that has separated us from God is torn down. And once that wall is breached we have the power to overcome the walls that keep us from being united as the body of Christ.

God is in the uniting business. Whether it is bringing reconciliation between people and God or between people in general; God's passion is unity. And the

fulfillment of God's passion is what is continuing to change lives and change communities as we both proclaim that passion and live it out within the church.

How many of you have heard the story this week of Ted Williams, the homeless man from Ohio who has been described as the man with the 'golden pipes.' Friday morning Ted and his mother appeared on GMA and they told a powerful story of how God broke through the wall that Ted had erected to keep God out of his life. Ted told the national television audience how God changed his life and gave him another chance. He and his mother gave a beautiful testimony to the power of God to break down walls erected by sin and to restore a life.

That, my friends, is the story of unity that God wants us to proclaim to a world that is as lost and homeless as Ted Williams once was. No wall that we've erected is too big to keep God out because through Jesus Christ God is reconciling- or uniting us- with himself.

But Paul reminds the Ephesians that if we are going to have any credibility to tell others the story of how God wants to be reunited with us; then we've got to get down to the business of unity in the body of Christ. If we are going to change lives and impact this community we need to tear down the walls that separate us and unite as one church, with one mission, united by one prayer.

If we are going to make an impact within these walls and beyond these walls; here's what Ephesians 4 calls us to do as a church.

We must make every effort to keep the gift of unity that Jesus gave his life to win for us. In fact, this section of Paul's letter gives some practical counsel on how to keep that unity: "we must be completely humble and gentle; we must be patient, we must bear with one another in love."

Humility. Gentleness. Patience. Bearing with one another in love. (lovingly accept each other) (making allowance for each other's faults because of your love)

Henry Mitchell is going to expound upon some of that next week in his message from Colossians 3.

A second thing that we must do according to Paul is find out what part we each play in the church and in the world—and play that part. It's what Paul speaks about elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 12 when he describes the church as a body. A united body means that all the parts work together and no one part is more important than all the others. As a matter of fact without the body parts united as one the body cannot be healthy and the body cannot fulfill its God given purpose.

When we read Ephesians 4, we see how God intends life to be within the church. This is not a community that never disagrees—some utopian colony of eternal "yes men." We're to speak the truth in love. Nor is the church supposed to be a community of conformity—where we all look the same, sound the same, and think the same. And we can add worship the same.

Ephesians 4 is actually a portrait of rich diversity. God gives different gifts to the church, calling each person in the church to a different role. But we are still one body and therefore this diversity is rooted in unity- a unity conceived by God.

Ephesians 4 sketches a church where God's people are prepared and gifted for unity so the church may be built up and ultimately we bear the fruit of that unity by demonstrating maturity in Christ.

The purpose of this unity is found in what it makes us: mature disciples of Jesus Christ. And the purpose of that maturity is that when our topsy-turvy world looks at a united church, they will see a portrait of Jesus—the real Jesus who lived and died and lives again; the Jesus who loves the world and who is revealed in scripture; the real Jesus who lives *in us*.

God has set things up in such a way that if anyone asks, "What is Jesus like? Who is Jesus? Is he loving? Is he good? Is he just? Is he generous? Does he comfort the oppressed? Will he confront the oppressor?"—all they will have to do is look at the church, to look at you and me as disciples of Jesus, to get the answer.

Paul opened this passage of Ephesians 4 with a challenge to his readers. That challenge is to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. I want to close today with that challenge to us as individuals and together as a church.

The challenge to us as individual disciples of Jesus is to live in such a way that we honor Jesus Christ who's prayer was that we might by one-one, so that the world may believe in Jesus. Individually, if we are going to live that worthy life we will display humility, gentleness, patience, and lovingly accept each other. And if we are going to live that worthy life we will discover and use our variety of gifts so that together we will individually and corporately demonstrate maturity in Christ.

Are you ready to accept that challenge as individuals?

The challenge is also to us as a church. If we are going to live a life worthy of our calling- and what is our calling, our mission (To Love God and Love Others); then we must seek always to be united. United as one church, fulfilling one mission, united by one prayer.

Are you ready to accept that challenge as one church?

When we live a life together that is worthy of our calling; then these walls will never divide us, and these walls will never limit our vision of those who need the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Now as the church of Jesus Christ known as Linglestown Life; let us rise as one and together pray the prayer that unites us as one Church, united by One Mission:

Almighty God, grant that we may fulfill Jesus' prayer for unity so that we become one church. May our unity be a demonstration to the entire world that Jesus is Lord.

Almighty God, grant that as we love you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and love our neighbor as we love ourselves, that we may become one church. As we fulfill our mission by connecting people to you and to one another, may we see the lives of disciples strengthened and may we fulfill our call to go and make disciples of all nations.

Almighty God, grant that we may be one in prayer as we seek to be one church. May our prayer be that through the unity of your body we may proclaim Good News, that we may heal the hurts of life and that we may welcome all who seek you.

Bless, O LORD, the ministry of Linglestown Life; that all the glory may be yours both now and forever more. Amen.