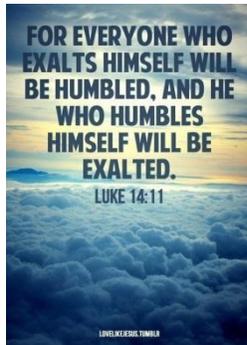


November 3, 2019

"...so that you may know him better..."

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled with the fullness of God."



"As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Ephesians 3:16-4:3

In a world as divided as ours currently is the concept of unity seems foreign at best and our ability to maintain it nearly impossible. But, as we noted last week, unity in relationship, is essential to our spiritual wellbeing and God's greatest desire for us. Jesus was sacrificed on the cross so that we could be reconciled to God, and his prayer for us is that we would be one like he and his Father are one.

Why then is unity in relationship so hard to find and so hard to maintain? If we consider Paul's words to the believers in Ephesus I think the answer to that challenge is pretty clear. The Apostle writes, ***"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."***

The opposite of ***"...humble and gentle..."*** is selfish arrogance and rude, harsh behavior. The opposited of ***"patient, bearing with one another"***, is impatience and condemning judgment. The simple answer to this challenge to maintain unity in relationship is our overwhelming tendency to act from ***"selfish ambition or vain conceit"*** (Philippians 2:1-4) instead of with gentle humility and patient forbearance. We choose to be led by our sinful natures fueled by our inherent selfishness and our relationships pay the price.

So, what does the Apostle mean when he tells us so clearly that the foundation of our unity begins with our being ***"completely humble and gentle"***. Humility is not the 'Aw shucks, it weren't nothing' attitude that most of us think about when we think about humility. It is instead, a life devoid of selfishness. In his letter to the church at Philippi Paul tells us, ***"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing..."*** (Philippians 2:5-6)

Jesus made ***"made himself nothing"*** or other versions say he ***"emptied himself"***. True humility is the emptying out of the self. The more I am able to be selfless the more humble I become and in turn the more gentle I can be. The order in which the Apostle describes these behavioral transformations is not accidental. We begin by becoming ***"completely humble"***. We can

then be constantly gentle and overwhelmingly patient. It will always be impossible for us to effectively bear with others until we become truly selfless.

Our unity is the product of our own transformation as we surrender our self to the power of the Spirit which opens the door to the indwelling Christ. This was Paul's prayer for the believers in Ephesus and, I think, for us as well. We cannot, he would show us, be rooted and established in love, nor can we understand the love of God for us, until and unless we are willing to become emptied.

The goal of the Holy Spirit working in our lives is always to help us empty ourselves, our selfish natures, so that Jesus can live within us. To put it bluntly, the enemy of our unity is always our own selfish nature. So, if our relationships are falling apart, if our churches erupting in divisiveness, if our marriages and families are failing, and if our culture is divided and destructive; the fault is found only and always in our own selfish behaviors.

Complete unity of relationship is absolutely possible for those who have emptied themselves and always and only impossible for those who have and will not.

