

Text: Ephesians 4:11-15. (Beck translation) 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. **August 5, 2018.**

Christ gave some to be pastors, so all of us get to be one. Amen .

E pluribus unum. Out of many, one. Maybe you learned something from the children's message today. I pray you don't learn only from the children's message today, but there is something wonderful to learn from that phrase on our money. E pluribus unum. Out of many, one. We are many people, many Christians, not just at our campus, our congregation, even our church body. We are many Christians all over the world. Yet, we are one. One in faith. One in unity. One because we have the same Savior, Jesus. One, because we have the same goal: a mature faith. One, because we are all part of the same body, the body of Christ. One, because we have the same head in that body: Christ. Yes, out of many, one. E pluribus unum. Out of many, one.

Christ did something amazing to make us one. He gave himself, to die on the cross and take away our sins. He also did something amazing to keep us one. He gave us people, each with a special task.

Apostles, those sent out with authority. Usually this word is reserved for Jesus' closest followers to whom he gave the power to perform miracles to back up their message. Probably not us. I haven't seen anyone do any miracles yet. But what about some to speak the Word? Does that describe you? Maybe you think first of our pastors and vicar. They speak the Word very publicly. Preach. Teach Bible class. Bible 101. Visit those on the hospital. But what about you? Why can't you speak God's Word to your spouse? Your children? A neighbor who is hurting? Could you ask your friend if it's ok if pastor visits them after surgery? You can speak the Word. You are Christ's gift.

There's those who speak the good news. What a cool thing to be called, huh? When you show up at work, wouldn't it be cool if people thought, "There goes someone who speaks the good news"? The term used in the Bible gave the idea of someone who went to a new place and started a new church. Sound like anyone here? This title focuses on growing numbers more than growing in strength. The more people hear the good news, the more is the many, of which come one. E pluribus unum, remember?

Then there's pastors and teachers. Did you notice that Christ gave some to be pastors? He didn't give some to do the work of a pastor, or to pastor like it's a verb. Christ gave some to be pastors. After 21 years, I hardly turn around if someone calls my first name. I will turn around if someone says, "Pastor." It's an honor to say, "That's who I am." It's a privilege that God's many people recognize, "That's what you are, pastor." And since we have a new pastor to be in our midst, I trust you won't mind letting God's Word give a little encouragement to Vicar Uhlhorn. Don't worry, Vicar, I won't embarrass you like this every sermon. But pastor is what you are preparing to be, not just do. The word pastor means shepherd. I came across this list of what shepherds at that time did. See if this sounds like today. The shepherd watched for enemies and defended the sheep from attack. Vicar will be watching for false teaching, pointing it out, and defending your souls from this spiritual attack. The shepherd healed the wounded and sick. Vicar won't heal your physical wounds, but when you are in the hospital, he'll be there to heal the wounds of your soul. Vicar will place the body and blood of Jesus on your lips and hearts to heal that gaping hole of guilt in your heart and tell you, "Your sins are forgiven! Go in peace!" That's about the best thing Vicar does for us. The shepherd found and saved the lost sheep. Vicar will be in our communities, visiting people, talking with those new to town, teaching Bible 101 to lost sheep. And I can

volunteer him. He'll be happy to meet with anyone, anyplace, anytime to reach the lost and teach God's Word. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the shepherd loved the sheep, shared his life with them, lived with them and gained their trust. Vicar wants to visit with you personally, not just as church members, but as people. Vicar wants to get to know you. He wants to hang out with you. Can I give a little commercial? When Vicar talks with you or emails you to visit with you, please say yes. When there's a sign up sheet for a visit with Vicar Uhlhorn or Pastor Ewings, sign up. They want to be your shepherd. They want to share your life. We are not too busy for our many members. Out of many, one. But can I beg of you, don't let pastors and vicars have all the fun of doing all the work themselves. We are to get God's holy people ready to serve as workers. Many workers, one mission: to get people to heaven. Many workers in the process of being ready. This process will take a lifetime and each one of us is a work in process. But that doesn't mean we have to wait until we are all perfectly ready. Then we will be waiting a lifetime and literally until eternity. Keep on attending worship to get stronger in your faith. Attend Bible studies and Vine and Branches to grow closer to Jesus and closer to each other. Then, serve where you are able.

Your service builds up the body of Christ. That body of Christ is made up of many members, but is one body. E pluribus unum, remember? The body of Christ, like any body, is built by exercise. Exercise your faith. Maybe it's a tangible thing like bringing treats or cleaning God's house. Those are ways to serve as workers and build the body of Christ. Maybe it's saying hi to a neighbor you have never met before. Maybe it's regularly reading the daily Meditations devotion in your home with your family. That builds up the body of Christ. You know, just like a body is always getting weaker or stronger, so your faith is always getting weaker or stronger. And I think you know which of the two happens when you do little or nothing. Maybe you think your work is little or nothing. But when the many are together, little things add up. I saw this quote. We overestimate what we can do on our own and underestimate what we can do together as a group.

E pluribus unum. Out of many, one. We get to be one. All of us get to be one. All of us striving for this unity, this oneness, this one-ity that comes as we hear the Word, serve as workers and build the body of Christ. We get to be one, out of many. We get to have one faith that is focused on Jesus. One knowledge, to completely and intimately know God's Son. The word for know talks about knowledge that is gained by experience, not just by the intellect, but a knowledge that is full and complete. That knowledge is focused on God's Son, getting to know God's Son through experience, getting closer to God's Son, by knowing him more fully and completely. And then having one goal: a mature manhood. Don't think this is a sexist or chauvinistic term. The one goal for all of us is maturity. The one goal the many have is to be focused on Christ. Vicar has spent the last six years of his life learning Greek and Hebrew to study God's Word in the original languages. And he's still growing. He has spent six years studying the Bible cover to cover and he's not done yet. I've read the Bible over 30 times and still have lots to learn. Paul, the man who wrote this letter to the Ephesians, he wrote 13 books of the Bible and notice he wrote, "As we reach a mature manhood and we grow to the full height of Christ." Yes, there is one goal for the many: maturity, and it's a goal we all are constantly striving toward.

You see, if we don't, we will stay babies, spiritual babies. Believing one thing one day and another thing the next. We will be self-centered like babies. We will be like babies on a ship, blown here and there. We will be like children, who fall for every trick and scheme, buying spiritual snake oil instead of the truth of God's Word. And you know, it's easy to stay a baby. Sometimes it even seems preferable. It's easier to

have pastor spoon feed me some of God's Word once a week than actually read it and wrestle with it on my own. But how will you know if pastor is giving you candy for the soul that tastes good now, but doesn't really nourish? How will we know if he's just telling us what we want to hear? Plenty of people and entire church bodies have been blown astray by the winds of false teaching of pastors. Plenty of people have fallen for the trick, "A loving God would never do that." As though the purpose of love is to let people do whatever makes them happy. As though what makes a baby happy is always what's best for the baby. But if you stay a baby, you'll always be dependant on others. If you think Bible 101, 201, 301, as great as they are, are enough, your spiritual muscles will get weak. If you are fine with Catechism class, thinking an eighth grade faith will be enough for every adult wind, you will be ripe pickings for the devil. Can I speak the truth and say it in a loving way? Thinking you can stay at the same spiritual level, being a baby, is the trickery of men, the scheming of the devil, a sin that blows you away from Christ. Can I tell the truth with love? We are sinners. Yes, that's the truth. And it's loving to say it. So that we are ready to hear another truth, one with lots of love. We are saved. Saved by Christ. Loved by Christ. Christ loved you so much he died for you. Christ rose from the dead so you will rise from the dead. Christ ascended into heaven so you will ascend into heaven to be with him forever. Christ gave you his greatest gift: forgiveness, so that Christ could give you as a gift to his Church, a gift that serves others, a gift that desires to continually grow, grow up into Christ who is the head, grow in your faith, grow in your personal and intimate knowledge of Christ, grow in the desire to hear and read and learn and study God's Word, grow in serving others and spreading the good news. Yes we are many, but with one head, Christ. Yes we have many gifts and personalities and roles, but we have one focus: Christ. Think of it like a triangle. Call it a love triangle if you will. At the top or head of this triangle is Christ. And at the points are these many believers in Christ, growing closer to him, reaching a mature manhood, getting better and better prepared to serve as workers. Well, what happens as those two points get closer to Christ? They get closer to each other! When both of the points are focused in one direction, they get closer to each other. When both points have one goal, they get closer together. Vicar is here to help us do that. Vine and Branches is here to help us do that, get closer to Jesus and get closer to each other, get many people closer to the one head, Christ. So that out of many, one. E pluribus unum, remember? Amen.

Let us tell the truth with love and grow up into him who is the Head—Christ. Amen.