

“A Vision for a United Church” • Nicky Gumbel, Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton Church, London
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1- UNITY IS RELATIONAL – AROUND JESUS

- quoted Ps 133:1,3 “How good and beautiful it is when God’s people live together in unity. For there the Lord bestows His blessing.”
 - there’s something so powerful about unity!
 - quoted Keller: “Unity is not simply the work of the Holy Spirit, but the very instrument through which the Holy Spirit works.” But unity is not easy!
- Eph 4:3: Make every effort to keep the unity of the Holy Spirit.
 - It’s given to us, but we have to make an effort to keep it.
 - Paul is writing to people who are close to Jesus, who had seen Him, yet they’re struggling with unity! So if you’re struggling with unity, you’re not alone.
- Why is unity hard?
 - No two people are completely compatible in marriage. Marriage is about how you deal with your compatibility. True of every relationship, every business. Hard to have unity in business, charity, local church.
 - in denominations we’re struggling with unity—btwn global church, look at some of the issues—women bishops, sexuality, contraception.
 - easy to split, start own group with those who agree with us
 - but Paul says make every effort to keep unity
- How can we have unity?
 - Have right attitude. Be completely humble.
 - PRIDE CAUSES DIVISION.
 - Gentle, opposite of arrogance—humble, gentle. Just like Jesus- patient with one another.
 - LOVE— this is what binds us all together
- Why bother?
 - We are living in extraordinary times.
 - Crisis in world, church, faith.
 - In these times we can either run, or stand together.
 - *“This crisis is a massive opportunity for the church to stand together and fight together.”*
- What’s the key to unity?
 - Paul is saying in Ephesians unity is relational.
 - Ultimately it’s **not doctrinal, it’s relational**.
 - If unity is around the trinity, they provide the model for unity. Best model in universe. Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
- Key to the vision:
 - **Unity around Jesus is the key to the evangelization of the nation.**
 - Eph 4:5—“One Lord, one faith...”
 - It’s the risen Jesus who is alive today—it’s all about Him.
 - “And if the world sees us divided, they’re never going to believe.”
 - John 17—Jesus’ prayer that we might be one.
 - Unity is not an option.
 - It’s Jesus’ prayer—He is still praying it, still interceding for us.
 - He’s praying for our unity...so that the world will believe.
 - “Why would be fighting each other instead of telling the world the good news about Jesus? What a waste of time when there’s such an urgent message for the world.

2- UNITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS KEY TO THE REVITALIZATION OF THE CHURCH

- Eph 4:4 “We are one body and one Spirit...”
- Jesus only has one body on earth, not lots of bodies, and everyone here is part of it!
- **Unity does not mean anonymity.**
 - doesn't mean we have to agree on everything
 - disagreement is healthy
 - you can disagree agreeably, relationships matter, this is model of Trinity
 - we disagree in the context of love
 - then when a decision is made, we have to back the leader
- **Unity doesn't mean uniformity**
 - we don't all have to look alike, sound alike, dress alike, think alike
 - we need a greater degree of diversity in the church, to allow for that—to say, ‘OK, you disagree with me, you have different views, but that's OK...’
 - everybody has a diff. gift— 1 Cor 12
 - *I used to think if some part of the church is different from me, they must be wrong. Now I think, “wow, they're different from me, I must have so much to learn from them!”*
 - I've come to love the Catholic church.
 - We did 1st Alpha Conference for Catholics in 1996
 - Saw the most amazing outpouring of the Holy Spirit at that conference.
 - That night I went home and read again Acts 10— *“If God has given them the same Spirit, who are we to oppose God?”*
 - *“The same Spirit lives in the Catholics, and the Orthodox, and the Pentecostals and the Protestants, even the Anglicans have the same Holy Spirit living within them. That's what makes us one!”*
- **Unity doesn't mean we're not interested in the truth.**
 - Paul says, “speaking the truth in love...” we need truth...love becomes weak.
 - quoted John Stott: “Love becomes weak if it's not strengthened by truth. Truth becomes hard if it's not softened by love.”
 - talked about the Donatists in 4th century church history who thought they were the only Christians.
 - separated off
 - debate with Augustine over if they had the truth
 - Augustine said, “you only have the truth if you have unity.”
 - If you lose one part of the body of Christ, you lose a part of the truth, because that part will see things in a different way.
 - And the only way we get the truth is through unity.
 - The more we have the whole body of Christ who see different aspects of the truth, the closer we get the truth.
 - Unity and truth are not opposed, they're complimentary.
 - **THE ONLY WAY TO GET TRUTH IS THROUGH UNITY.**
 - Eph 4:15,16
 - So...could we resolve to love one another, to learn from one another, to honor one another, to speak well of one another...to stop hating each other, to stop fighting each other?
 - In a body, it's absurd if different parts are fighting each other.
 - we should be coming to each other's defense!
 - let's stop passing judgement on one another

- quoted Pope Francis: “Let’s trust the Holy Spirit who can heal and reconcile us, and accomplish what humanly doesn’t seem possible.”

2- UNITY COMES FROM THE FATHER WHO IS THE KEY TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY.

- We live in a divided world that demands a united church.
- Root of all problems in the world? Division!
 - breakdown of marriage
 - breakdown of family life
 - breakdown internally of nations, btw nations
- And we have the answer!
 - Paul gives the answer—we have one God and Father of all who is over all and in all and through all.
 - the answer is in relationships!
- We have the model of unity is the family of God—we are brothers and sisters—one family united around the Father.
- Not just that you love Jesus, whatever part of the body of Christ you belong to...
 - it’s that we each have the Holy Spirit living inside of us
 - but more than that, God is my Father and God is your Father
- In a family we don’t exclude those we disagree with.
 - you can disagree vehemently with someone in your family, even their lifestyle, but still include them in the family!
 - the more diversity the better in a family
- The devil is prowling around trying to divide us.
 - He knows if he can get us fighting, then he’ll get in there.
 - He waits for the church to fight each other
 - We have to resist the devil and say, “we’re not going to fight each other.”
 - We’re not going to allow him to destroy the church—we are going to unite, we are going to keep attentive, keep vigilant.
- We need a new perspective on the issues of the world.
 - What we are fighting about in the church is not as important as ISIS beheading Christians. Did ISIS say before beheading, “are you a Coptic Christian, a Catholic, a Protestant...”
 - ISIS thinks we are one body! And we are!
- “Invisible Unity”:
 - in his college experience, a fellow student said, “The incarnation was not invisible. The invisible God became visible in Jesus. The Incarnation demands a visible expression of the invisible church.”
 - “We may not get this in our lifetime, but we can have signs of it. I believe this conference is a visible sign of our invisible unity.”
- “I have a dream (or a vision, or gut feeling, or longing) that our children and grandchildren will look back at this generation of the church and they won’t say, “they just kept splitting, kept fighting...” but that they got together, they united...they resolved that they would pray for unity, make every effort for unity... that they would unite around Jesus Christ, that they would lay aside their personal agendas, political agendas, all the stuff that can come away from unity... they resolved that they would so seek the HS and be filled with him... rather than criticizing, but would see each other as brothers and sisters... and from that a movement spread that brought a unity to the church...”