

A few years ago, 400 professional and amateur musicians gathered together in a hall in Philadelphia for a unique performance of a "Symphony for a Broken Orchestra."

Each of the musicians brought with them a broken instrument: a trumpet held together with tape, a violin with no strings, a bow that had lost most of its hair, a cello carried in multiple pieces.

These were just some of the broken instruments that have fallen into disrepair in the public school system. And this concert was organised to raise funds to repair some of them.

But none of these instruments worked properly. Some of them couldn't be played in the normal way at all. Individually they couldn't amount to very much.

But those musicians found creative ways to play them.

- A trumpet couldn't produce a sound, but its keys could be tapped to a rhythm.
- A bow was scraped over the violin body to add an unusual element.
- A cellist made noise by turning a stringless peg.

And incredibly, under the direction of the composer David Lang, together, in harmony, they produced 40 minutes of music that was beautiful, playful and full of joy.

In many ways that's like the church. Each of us are like those broken instruments. The best that we can do on our own is simply a tap or squeak. But together, if we work in harmony under the direction of our leader, we can produce a joyful song of praise.

This is what Paul taught in his letter to the Philippians. He knew that there were some in this church who were struggling to get on with each other. And so he encouraged them that despite all the struggles they had, despite their weakness and brokenness, they could stand strong and serve effectively in God's kingdom, if they served in unity.

Philippians 1:27-2:5: "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

² If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

1. The Importance of Unity

The believers in Philippi knew that living for Jesus wasn't easy. When Paul and Silas had planted this church they'd ended up in prison, their feet in stocks, their backs bleeding from a severe flogging. And now Paul was writing to them from another imprisonment, this time in Rome.

And he wrote to them, "You are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have." Philippians 1:30 They too were facing opposition and attacks from a world system that hated them because of their Lord.

They knew that they had been called, "Not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him." Philippians 1:29

And this is true in different ways for all of us. Jesus was open about the fact that following him would not be easy. He said, "In this world you will have trouble." John 16:33 We live in a world, under the influence of Satan, who is against us at every step.

a) Co-operation in Battle

But this is one of the reasons why unity is so important. Despite all the pressure from this world, if we're united together, then we'll be able to "Stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel." Philippians 1:27

One of the secrets of the success of the Roman army was that they fought as a single unit. An example of this was the Testudo or Tortoise formation where they held their shields in a tight arrangement in front and above them. As long as they stood and moved together, as one, they were protected and could withstand any onslaught.

And the same goes for the church. When we work together for the faith of the gospel, we will be able to stand strong. There is amazing strength when we stand together.

b) Courage in Suffering

This is also a source of courage for us. Paul knew that if the Philippians stood together, then they'd be able to stand ["Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you."](#) Philippians 1:28

The word translated here as frightened is like "the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses." But as Christians we don't need to turn and run away in fear when we face opposition. If we're united then we can stand courageous and immovable even in the facing of overwhelming opposition!

c) Conviction of Sin

And this will impact people around us. ["This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God."](#) Philippians 1:28

The courage and strength of the church in the face of intense opposition, suffering and even death will be a powerful witness to the world that those who reject Christ are lost, and those who trust in Christ are saved.

This is what Jesus prayed for us just before he was arrested: ["May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and loved them even as you have loved me."](#) John 17:23

Unity is essential if we're going to be strong, courageous and effective as we live for Christ in this world. Disharmony and division weakens us, creates fear and makes us ineffective in our witness!

d) Citizens of Heaven

But unity is not just important for practical or pragmatic reasons. Paul started this section by calling the believers to, ["Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."](#) Philippians 1:27

Unity is not just a useful weapon against the world, it is how we live in keeping with the value and meaning of the gospel!

This phrase 'conduct yourselves' can be translated 'live as citizens'. The town of Philippi had a privileged position as a Roman colony. This meant that citizens of Philippi had the status of being citizens of Rome with all the legal, economic and political advantages and responsibilities this brought.

But if we've believed in Jesus, then our primary citizenship is not tied to a city or country or empire. Rather, ["Our citizenship is in heaven."](#) Philippians 3:20. Heaven is our home, heaven is where we belong – so our attitudes, lifestyles, morals and priorities should reflect those of heaven. We need to live in a way that's consistent with being a citizen of heaven.

And since heaven is a place of fellowship, love and unity, that means we should live like that now. Our unity with other believers is a crucial part of what it means to live out who we are.

2. The Foundations of Unity!

It is also the a proper response to what Christ has done by laying down his life for us on the cross. This is what Paul developed at the start of chapter 2.

He used the word ["If."](#) Philippians 2:1 four times here. But maybe this word could better be translated, "since", because Paul was not doubting if these four things were true or not. Rather, he knew that they were true for all those who've trusted in Jesus and are the foundations of Christian unity.

a) We are In Christ

Firstly, if we've trusted in Jesus then we have ["Encouragement from being united with Christ."](#) Philippians 2:1 We are now in Christ. We've been brought into a life-giving, intimate and eternal relationship with him that has totally transformed our lives for now and for ever!

b) We are Loved by God

Secondly, we know that we are loved. We have “Comfort from his love.” Philippians 2:1. The cross of Jesus declares for all time that we are loved by God in an unconditional, unlimited, unending, and undeserved way.

So God’s love is, and will be, forever the theme of our praise and our wonder. It revolutionises our lives. It gives us value. It brings comfort and reassurance in difficult times. It fills our empty and aching hearts. It gives confidence and hope.

c) We are in Communion with the Spirit

Thirdly, we also have “Fellowship with the Spirit.” Philippians 2:1 When we put our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit came to live in us and with us. We can now live in constant communion with God. We’re never alone. He’s always with us to teach, direct, equip and empower us.

Maybe Paul was emphasising the work of the triune God in our salvation. We are united with the Son, loved by the Father and indwelt by the Spirit.

d) We have Changed Hearts

But fourthly, Paul also said that we have “Tenderness and compassion.” Philippians 2:1

When we trusted in Jesus, we were given a new heart with new emotions, new compassion and care for others. This is what God prophesied through Ezekiel: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Ezekiel 36:26

This is what God in his grace has done in our lives. And this is the foundation of our unity with each other.

- If we’re united with Christ, then we’re also united with each other.
- If we’re loved by the Father, then we’re brought into one family.
- If we share in the Spirit, then we’ve been baptised into one body.
- If we’ve been given a new heart, then it beats with compassion and care for God’s people.

So we’re not called to produce the unity of the church, this already exists because of who we are. “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all.” Ephesians 4:4-6

3. Our Responsibility for Unity!

And so we’re simply called to live out the truth of what God has already done in our lives.

a) Our Shared Responsibility

This is our shared responsibility. Paul challenged the church in Philippi to fill his heart with joy by “Being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” Philippians 2:2

This was not a call to external uniformity. It is not about conforming to a code of behaviour or system of laws. It is about something deeper than that.

- It is a unity of our thoughts. Since we’re united with Christ, we should think the same things because we have the mind of Christ.
- It is a unity of heart. Since we’ve experienced God’s love, we should express this love to God’s people.
- And it is a oneness of spirit. Since we’re in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, so we are to fellowship with those in whom the Spirit dwells.
- And it is a oneness in purpose. Since we’ve a changed heart, we should have a common goal and direction. Our mutual concern for each other should be that we all fulfil God’s will.

This is our shared responsibility. Each one of us who have trusted in Jesus are called to live together in radical unity of mind, heart, spirit and will.

b) Our Individual Responsibility

But the problem with a shared responsibility, is that sometimes we can leave it to someone else.

Maybe you’ve heard the story about when there was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody’s job. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.

But Paul doesn't let us dodge our responsibility in this. Unity is not only a shared responsibility. It is also our individual responsibility to behave in a way that will cultivate unity in our church.

i) A Correct Aim

So we need to **"Do nothing out of selfish ambition."** Philippians 2:3. Selfish ambition is about looking out for what suits me, pleases me and is best for me. It alienates others and divides communities.

Instead, we need to have a correct aim in life, to **"Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."** Philippians 2:4 We need be able to see what other people need, be willing to aim for what will promote the good of others even at our own personal expense. It is an unselfish, sacrificial concern produced by genuine love for others.

ii) A Correct Assessment

And if we are going to act this way, then we need to cultivate a correct assessment of ourselves. We must **"Do nothing out of... vain conceit."** Philippians 2:3. That is about empty pride. Having an inflated assessment of our own worth.

Instead we need to **"in humility consider others better than yourselves."** Philippians 2:3. This is not about low self-esteem. It is not about thinking that we're worth nothing. Rather it is thinking of ourselves as we really are, and recognising the value of others.

Humility leads us to look to other people's interests because we see other people's value.

An incident in last year's London Marathon illustrated this. In a video shared on social media, one of the thousands of competitors that day was struggling near the end of the race. He doubled over and looked on the verge of collapse as others ran by him.

But just before he fell to the ground, another runner came from behind and grabbed his arm. He held him steady enough to keep moving forward.

Then another ran over take his other arm. And so together, the three of them made their way to the finish line. Those two runners were willing to set aside their goals and desires for the sake of another.

And that's the servant-attitude that we need in church. Not powerful personalities that driven by their own inflated egos and demand their own agendas and plans, but a humble assessment of our value and a selfless aim to look not only to our own interests, but the interests of others.

iii) A Christ-like Attitude

But why should we be willing to do this? Well the answer is in Philippians 2:5: **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."** We should have this attitude because this is a Christ-like attitude.

Jesus rejected vain conceit and selfish ambition. Instead he expressed true humility and selfless concern for others. We can see this all through his life, but most clearly at the cross!

In this letter, Paul went on to describe this in detail in a wonderful hymn describing the servant attitude of Christ, but we'll leave that for next week.

But here is the answer to how we can see our church grow together in unity. We need to follow Jesus' example. Walk in his footsteps. Let him change our hearts, our priorities, our value-system, our goals and ambitions through the power of his Spirit. We need to become more like Jesus!

Conclusion

And we're called to do this **"Whatever happens..."** Philippians 1:27 As we saw last time, Paul was going through a tough time – imprisonment in Rome and possible martyrdom, as well as envy and rivalry of other Christians, who thought they could use his suffering to promote themselves.

But none of that would excuse a divisive or selfish attitude. Whatever happened, Paul knew that he was called to humbly and selflessly, serve in unity with God's people.

And whatever the circumstances of our lives, whatever conditions we face, however selfish or difficult other Christians are, we're called to do to the same.

- **The Importance of Unity:** Unity is vitally important if we're going to stand in the face of opposition and be effective in our witness for Christ.
- **The Foundation of Unity:** Unity is our only proper response to all that we've experienced through our faith in Christ.
- **Our Responsibility for Unity:** And so unity is our responsibility, to reject the attitude of this world and instead see the value of other people, consider what they need and so follow the example of Christ.

And if we do, then even in our brokenness, our lives can come together as a symphony of praise to the glory of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ!

Andrew Burt
Enniscorthy Christian Fellowship
January 28th 2024