

Ecclesiology

Ephesians 2:13-22

The Second Sunday after Trinity, June 10, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

The Law creates divisions.

The Law creates divisions because people argue about how much of it needs to be kept.

Consider Judaism as we currently find it. It is divided. The reason that it is divided is that the Jews cannot agree on how much of it should be kept. They have the Law. It is written in Exodus through Deuteronomy. The words are in black and white on the printed page. Even we Gentiles can read it. Yet the Jews cannot agree on how much of it should be kept. Some say that all of it should be kept. Some say that only some of it should be kept. Some say that only that which can be kept should be kept. Some say that in addition to the precepts of the Law in the Torah of Scripture the traditions of the elders should be kept. Then there is a debate as to which of the elders traditions should be kept because the elders do not all agree. And then once we settle on which elders traditions should be kept, how much of that particular elders traditions should be kept? The Talmud is filled with answers to questions like: if the candles go out during Passover do you have to start the service all over again? The Rabbis debate whether or not square matzo is acceptable as opposed to round matzo and on it goes.

And we Christians are no better.

Rome has all of its rules that it has assembled in its over one thousand year long history. And even though Roman Catholicism appears united from the outside within it is not united. It is only institutionally united. The reason is because it is an institution that is founded upon the Law. Roman Catholicism has not only the Old Testament but also the New Testament. How many of these precepts should be kept? How many should we leave behind? On what circumstances should we leave a precept behind? What about new circumstances? Do they indicate that there should be new rules? For how long do those new rules apply? These rules get inscribed in canon law which is about as long as the Talmud. It answers all kinds of questions like how many times a person should go to confession and how many times a person should say the Lord's Prayer and on it goes. Under what circumstances should an exception be made to these rules? And on it goes.

And Protestantism is no better. All Protestantism does is separate itself from the Roman pope and tell the Roman pope that we are going to keep the rules better than you can. And then Protestantism immediately divides into all kinds of little groups each one claiming that they are keeping the rules better than anyone else is keeping the rules. Some Protestant groups are pacifists who won't own a gun and condemn those who do so. Some Protestants are patriotic and join the military and have special services on the Fourth of July and Memorial Day weekend and Veterans Day Weekend where it appears the United States is being worshipped rather than the incarnate God. Some Protestants think that we should not worship on Sunday because the pope does and most of us don't see anything wrong with it. Some Protestants think that we should not use any musical instruments in Divine Service because the New Testament does not mention musical instruments only the Old Testament does. And some Protestants will use musical instruments of all kinds regardless of the message that such musical instrumentation might send. Some Protestants insist on an age accountability for Baptism and some do not. Some Protestants insist on a certain frequency of Holy Communion and some do without it all together. Some Protestants insist on certain liturgical vestments and other Protestants condemn them for wearing them. And each time there is a disagreement about how much of the law should be kept the new group that has

determined that this new rule should be kept or not kept leaves the group that disagrees with it and forms its own group.

In the United States of America the government does not do anything to put a lid on the number of new Protestant groups come into being and the number of Protestant groups that go out of being. This is a blessing for the truth of the Gospel, but it is a curse in that Protestant who insist on keeping a different set of rules from all of the other Protestants can break off and form their own group. The witness of the Gospel is not served because the unbelievers look at all of the different groups and cannot make out which one has the truth because there are so many of them.

This is what happens when the Church operates according to Law. All that happens is a big argument about how much of the Law should be kept or how little of the Law should be kept. All that happens is a big argument about when exceptions to the Law should be made and when exceptions to the Law should not be made. Endless books could be filled with the necessary casuistry in order to keep the Law.

The problem is compounded when Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and even Islam insist that keeping the Law is necessary for salvation. What that does is add angst to the particular set of rules that each group has figured out that it wants to keep. In other words if my little Protestant group has a set of rules that it thinks needs to be kept in order to be saved, then I will defend that little set of rules no matter what anyone else says because I do not want to lose my salvation. I will not retract anything. I will not back off from anything. Even when inconsistencies are shown to me I will not concede them for fear of losing my salvation. Then the Protestant groups become entrenched and no one will listen to anyone else. All of them are convinced that everyone else is going to hell because they are not following the right rules before God.

There are some people in view of this whole argument and how incredulous it become say to themselves that the rules of their own particular group cannot be that important and so they quit the group, but since everyone else also has a set of rules just a different set of rules, they don't join any other group because to do so would not change the situation at all. It would be merely to exchange one set of rules for another set of rules. And once we are there certainty of salvation is out the window. Who knows which sets of rules will save?

And so when the Church does things by the Law, not only is there division there is also uncertainty and the witness of the Gospel to the world is lost.

That is not the case when things are done by the Gospel. When things are done by the Gospel there is unity. The reason that there is unity when things are done by the Gospel is that God is doing them and there is only one God.

There is only one God. Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one! There are not multiple gods. If there were multiple gods there would be disunity. One god and his people would fight against another god and his people. And even if the two gods got along together and did not command their people to fight against the people of the other god, there is still no unity because one god has his people and the other god has his people and the two gods are not saying the same things to their people. One people believes one thing because its god tells it so and another people believes its god because its god tells it so.

But there are not multiple gods. There is only one God. When He acts it is the act of the one God. His actions bring unity because they are His actions and He is one.

So what does the one God do? The one God brings those who are far away near. He brings those who are far away from Him near to Him.

Who are those who are far away from Him? Those who are far away from Him are the ones who are divided. Since He is One, those who are far away from Him are not one. They are therefore divided. They are therefore those who are living under the law. Those who are far away from God are living under the Law. And it does not matter which Law they are using. They could be using the Law of Moses or they could be using the Code of Hammurabi. It does not matter. Law is law. It is a set of rules that should be followed.

God has brought those who are far away near. He has brought them near by the New Covenant. The New Covenant is the covenant of the body and blood of Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar. He Himself calls it the New Covenant. And at this table of the Lord there is no rule to be followed except the simple instruction to eat and to drink which are so simple that there is no controversy about them. And in this New Covenant something happens that no rule even the rules that come from God can do: sins are forgiven.

When sins are forgiven it does not matter what rules you are following, the violation of those rules are forgiven. And frankly it does not matter what rules you are following even if you are following the most lenient and relaxed rules of them all, you are not keeping them and you cannot keep them. If the human has even only one rule to keep, he will break it. In fact our founding was done in that way. There was only one rule to keep in the Garden and we did not keep it. So what does it matter if you have fifty religious rules or 5000? It does not matter. Even if you had only one rule to follow, you would not keep it.

Have you ever tried? I have. I have tried to keep one rule and it is not long before I do not keep it. Try it sometime and see if you can do it. The rules that we expect other people to live by are rules that we do not keep ourselves.

And so in order for there to be unity at the Sacrament of the Altar the one God does everything and by doing everything, He brings unity.

First of all, the One God sends His Son.

There is only one unique Son of God. Because He is the unique Son of God, He reveals God. Therefore the unity of the revelation of God is found in Him. When He is displaced disunity arises. We are only sons of God in so far as that we have been baptized into Him. Because we are baptized into Him we are sons of God. He is the unique Son of God and because we are baptized into Him there is unity among us. Such a unity is not one that we established. If it were it would be disunity. But since He has established the unity of our sonship before God, it is unity.

The One Son reveals the One Father. There is no one else for the One Son to reveal. When He reveals the One Father the one Father is revealed and once He is revealed there is unity because there is no one else to reveal and so no one else is revealed.

The One Son offers the One sacrifice that takes away the world's sins and by taking away the world's sins takes away the disunity that the Law brings.

Sin, among other things, is the revelation of the disunity of the Law. The reason that we all want to keep different laws is because we cannot keep the laws that we have. When we cannot keep the laws that we have, we try to keep different laws. We may be trying to keep different laws well enough, but we have not given up on the notion of law. And so we sin against one set of regulations and so we trade them for another set of regulations. We try to be strict and then we try to be lenient, but whether we are strict or lenient we still sin against the law that we have.

The only Son of the One God brings unity because He offers the one sacrifice that takes away the world's sin and sins. First of all, it atones for our lack of familiarity much less keeping of God's Law. God commands that we love Him above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. It is ludicrous to think that

we could keep two commands. We can't keep one! We have not loved God above all things because we have not had God as our god. We have gone off and worshipped every Tom, Dick, and Harry who are more than willing to hand out their rules for how we should live our lives. And so the fact that we try to be saved by the Law is the problem itself. It is not faith. And everything that does not proceed from faith is sin.

That is what the Son of God atoned. He atoned for the sin of the whole world. He atoned for your sin. He did not atone for part of the world or a fraction of the world, but of the whole world. The whole world's sins are forgiven. He granted atonement for all of it by His sacrifice. And since it was one sacrifice that took away all sin and all sins, then there is unity. He brought it about by His death. There is only one Savior, one Christ, one Priest, who is both God and man.

What Jesus did for you, He did for everyone and that makes you brothers. The only ones who would not be brothers are those who would refuse to believe this.

And the One Son of the One Father, and this One Son is also the One Priest, is the mediator of a new covenant. He is the mediator of a covenant that is based upon forgiveness and not based upon the law. The law brings disunity. The new covenant brings unity.

And the new covenant is His blood which He offers to us to drink. And when you do there is unity.

I know that there are members of the congregation who do not care for each other. There are sins between members of the congregation. Some of them are long standing and some of them are of recent origin. If you expect to solve your problem with the law you will never solve it. You will always be angry until the day that you die. And if the other person goes first there will be no opportunity for unity then.

But think of this: the person with whom you are angry, the person that you have not spoken to in years or that you are avoiding at Divine Service, that is the person for whom Christ died. He died for you and He died for them. When you attend the Sacrament of the Altar together the One Priest of the One God is doing the same thing for you that He is doing for the one with whom you are in conflict. He is feeding that person His body and blood and He is feeding you. Do not think of the Sacrament of the Altar as some kind of right that you have, like, "I have the right to eat this and drink it." You have no right to any of it. You are sinner obsessed with solving all of your problems with the law and making sure that fair play is dealt out in all situations and it has gotten you nowhere in resolving your conflicts. You are still angry with them and they are still angry with you because your conscience and theirs knows that fair play has not been offered up.

But fair play will never be offered up. Because that is the way of the Law. Enough will never be enough.

What must happen is that the Lord must bring unity which He does in the New Covenant. It is His death and His resurrection given into your mouth to eat and to drink thus bringing unity with everyone with whom you are eating and drinking. You are eating and drinking the one body and the one blood. There is no other to eat and to drink.

And so the way of unity is the way of confessing sin and sins. The way of unity is admitting fault and asking for forgiveness. The way of unity is laying aside the demand for justice and fair play knowing that if God did that we would all be going to hell.

And the ultimate way in which God laid aside His demand for justice is when He privileged you, you miserable sinner, over the life of His Son. He laid aside His own demand for justice to have unity with you. And if you continue to demand justice from the one who wronged you, then you think that you are greater than God and there is no greater unbelief and faithlessness than that. It results in unforgiveness and disunity.

The unity that the Son of God brings is the only unity that there is. It is a unity that does not happen unless He does. And thank God He has done it. He has done it in the fulfillment of His priestly office. He made the one sacrifice and then gives that one sacrifice of His one body and one blood to you eat and to drink, thus doing for you what He does for everyone else. And when He treats you the same as He treats anyone else, He brings unity.

And when there is unity, there is peace.

In the Name of Jesus Amen.