

Thursday Prayer 18th April 2024 at 10.30am

Focus: “Unity” – Philip Baker

Zoom connecting details and link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83847809128?pwd=VVhXUGlNWkpaGkyMUdwWHQvcC9tQT09>

Meeting ID: 838 4780 9128

Passcode: 338053

Welcome to everyone taking part this morning, whether in the Cathedral or joining remotely via Zoom.

Introduction and opening prayers:

We gather our thoughts and start by praying for members and events in the diocese: For those working to implement the conclusions of the recent Diocesan Spring Meeting and for the Task Group Leaders reviewing their work during the year; for all those working for the end of modern slavery in all its many forms both here in the UK and around the world. We give thanks for the work of the Branches whatever that might be. We give special thanks for our members around the world, all 4 million of us, who share the desire to improve the lives of others, through work with families and support of family life. Finally, we give thanks for Mary Sumner, a most special lady without whom our movement would not exist.

The theme for this morning is “Unity” and the reading is taken from Acts.

We say together – **We join with our family throughout the world, with one voice, to glorify God’s Name. Though we may never meet, we are united in prayer. We share our sorrows and joys and together praise our God. As the family of God we are united in love. We glorify our Father with thankful hearts. Amen**

Reading: Acts 4: 32-35 - “Voluntary sharing among believers at Jerusalem” (NIV)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the Apostles feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Reflection:

Unity. It is a word we use quite commonly but, until it was given me as the subject for these prayers and thoughts, not a word I had given much deep thought to. We use “unity” as a word to explain the concept of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit being one. I have not, however, ever heard a satisfactory explanation for that concept which is any better than the single word “unity”! It also covers the concept of each one of us being in unity with the Holy Spirit and, through that, in unity with all other Christians around the world. So, we are used to this little word of just 5 letters conveying meaning beyond our comprehension. Let us see if we can make some sense out of it in the context of the reading we have received from Acts, which opens with the words “All the believers were one in heart and mind.”

This reading is all about a special sort of unity and a special time. About sacrificial giving which serves as an example to us all even now. A little background to set the scene will help us. The author of Acts was Luke, writing in about AD 60. Luke’s Gospel is about the origins of Christianity, but this book is about the origins of the Church. This was a time of conflict; the Jewish and Roman authorities were in conflict and Christians this early in the establishment church did not know what the church they were starting should look like. How should it be organised? Who would run it? What should we do. How do we protect ourselves?

We would have had the same problem if it were us. But they all shared a strong belief in God and that Jesus had been the son of God on earth. This would have brought them together out of a common belief and sense of purpose. A “unity” of mind. However, in this hostile and confusing world, the early followers of Christ would have had to support each other, would have had to identify with each other and with their core beliefs and aims, which they were not, as yet, at all clear about. Jesus had shown them that compassion and mercy was to be one of their trademarks, so what better way of living that out than to share everything they had, thus ensuring that none were destitute. Unlike today, the alternative to “having” was “not having” at all, there was no support from the state. You can see this today, in the way that people gather resources after a disaster to mitigate the impact on those affected. This would have been a great comfort to them individually, knowing that there were others looking out for them.

But there is more to it than that. This was the first thing these early Christians did. They did it because it was how they saw their place in the world as Christians – what we would call today their “USP” – Unique Selling Point - the one thing that most showed what they were about. So, it is about more than the dictionary definition of unity – it is about the very ethos of being a Christian. And that is a message which has survived time, about 2,000 years of time, and is still true today. First and foremost, it is about our individual unity with God, God living in us and us in Him, and then there is the unity of all Christians, brought about by us all being with God and therefore all being together as one. It is why we describe ourselves as brothers and sisters in Christ, because, in a sense, we are all related by our faith.

I do not know whether they were conscious of the other benefits which would accrue to them through this show of unity. It would have given them protection against those who wished them harm. There would be others with whom to discuss how the church should be set up, how it should be organised, in what ways it would spread the word of Christ. That would also give them encouragement to carry on, they were not alone, they were in a group. These were, remember, very early days, unity was the only thing they had to support their belief. And how important that still is. How much more can be achieved by a large number of people all saying the same thing than the same people speaking as individuals. In those early days they clung together for safety; these days we work together to create greater impact. We feed from each other and, working together, we grow our faith as we understand God’s word more through talking with and observing each other. So, although the church is now better organised and has spread throughout the world, the need for unity as shown by the early Christians in 60 AD is in no way lessened. *Amen*

Hymn: Bind us Together, Lord

**Chorus: Bind us together, Lord, bind us together / with cords that cannot be broken;
Bind us together, Lord, bind us together / O bind us together with love.**

**There is only one God, there is only one King,
there is only one body – that is why we sing:**

Chorus

**Made for the glory of God, purchased by His precious Son.
Born with the right to be clean, for Jesus the victory has won.**

Chorus

**You are the family of God, you are the promise divine,
You are God’s chosen desire, you are the glorious new wine.**

Chorus

The Mothers' Union Prayer: We say together:

Loving Lord, we thank you for your love so freely given to us all.

We pray for families around the world.

Bless the work of the Mothers' Union as we seek to share your love through the encouragement, strengthening and support of marriage and family life.

Empowered by your Spirit, may we be united in prayer and worship, and in love and service, reach out as your hands across the world.

In Jesus' name. Amen

Mothers' Union Prayer Diary

The theme of the month is "Abundant life" We pray: We celebrate abundant life with full and thankful hearts. We give thanks for the imprint of heaven which enhances our life in the here and now. May our appreciation of all we enjoy bring praise to our bountiful God. Amen

The theme for the week is "Walking with God" Today we pray: For everyone who is housebound or who cannot physically walk, that they would know that they can still walk with God in a special way. May they know the joy of leaning on Him for strength and comfort today.

The Wave of Prayer for today is for: Kindu in DR Congo; Mount Kenya West in Kenya; Egbu in Nigeria; Te Pihopatanga O Aotearoa in New Zealand; Cork, Cloyne & Ross in All Ireland and Eastern Himalayas in India.

Our Intercessions:

We pray for:

The worldwide work of the Mothers' Union;

Our Worldwide President, Sharon Harper;

The Chief Executive, Bev Jullien, and all who work at Mary Sumner House supporting members;

Our Diocesan President, Hazel Williams, and our Trustees and Task Group Leaders;

Our Provincial President, Kathryn Anderson and all members in the Province of Canterbury

Our Worldwide Links: Lusaka in Zambia, Shyogwe in Rwanda, Sokoto & Ikka in Nigeria, Karimnager in India;

The Diocese Links: Kigali and Vellore.

And we also pray for:

Our own parishes in the Ely Diocese, our families, and our friends

Anyone known to us who is unwell or in need

Any who are finding it difficult to feel the love and support of the Christian Community, worldwide

The many countries around the world experiencing conflict, oppression, natural disasters and anywhere where people live in fear or poverty.

The Mothers' Union Thursday Prayer, we say together:

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers, we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

God of forgiveness, we ask for your unfailing love to be with us today, so that we may reach out to others with love and compassion. Help us to seek peace and reconciliation with each other, and unite us as one family of God to your glory. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The Grace