

THE OPENING SERMON

for the

Fifty-fourth Annual Convention

of the

CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Delivered by the Rev. Robert J. Lietz, Conference President

Text: Ephesians 4:3

In the name of our always-faithful Teacher and Counselor, dear students of His Word (Psalm 25:4-5; 119:104; John 10:27):

Remember! Do not forget!! Jesus said in regard to the Lord's Supper: "*This do in remembrance of Me*" (I Corinthians 11:24). The psalmist confessed: "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits*" (103:2). In his Second Epistle, the Apostle Peter declared: "*I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance*" (II Peter 1:12-15). This sermon is intended to stir up your memory of the truths which you have been taught in the past. Therefore, prompted by the powerful and living words of Ephesians 4, verse 3, we will focus on

TWO TIMELY REMINDERS FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS:

I. Keep on being diligent in preserving the unity of the Spirit, and

II. Keep on being diligent in preserving the bond of peace.

I.

The fourth chapter of Ephesians begins with these words from the Apostle Paul: "*I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*" (vv. 1-2). From prison, the apostle begged and pleaded with his fellow believers to live in a becoming way the life which God had given them when He had "*called [them] out of darkness into His marvelous light*" (I Peter 2:9). The apostle also reminded his spiritual brothers and sisters – including us – to be humble, gentle, and patient, bearing with one another in love, that love which is willing to sacrifice self for others; that love which "*is kind, ...envieth not, ...vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth*" (I Corinthians 13:4-6). Oh, how **we** need to remember and not forget these words of instruction and counsel!

Now, in our sermon text, the third verse of Ephesians 4, the apostle continues by declaring to his beloved believers: *“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit.”* God Himself, through the apostle, urges us to keep on being diligent, eager, and earnest in guarding, watching over attentively, and preserving the unity brought about by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel of Christ. We are to work hard at retaining this unity of the Spirit; we are not to become weary and tired of doing the important work of defending with awe and showing the utmost respect for the *“sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”* (Ephesians 6:17). Do **we** also need the reminders of Galatians 6: *“Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”* (vv. 9-10)?

What is this *“unity of the Spirit”*? It is the **oneness**, the sameness of the Holy Spirit as He works through the Holy Scriptures. Does this *“unity of the Spirit”* mean the same as the unity of Scriptural doctrine and practice? Of course! When the psalmist exclaimed, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”* (133:1), was he talking about the *“unity of the Spirit”*? Yes, most certainly! Furthermore, was the apostle talking about this *“unity of the Spirit”* when he declared: *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment”* (I Corinthians 1:10)? This verse, without any doubt, is talking about the *“unity of the Spirit.”*

The **oneness** and the sameness of the Holy Spirit’s teachings in the Holy Scriptures are, furthermore, emphasized in the verses right after our sermon text, where we are reminded that *“there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all”* (vv. 4-6a). It would be very much in order to add on to these **one** Lord’s Supper, **one** creation, **one** heaven, **one** pardon for all sin, **one** justification for the world of sinners through the **one** Lord Jesus Christ, etc.

The **one** Lord Jesus Christ is the **one** and only God-Man; He is the **one** and only hope for sinners; there is none other (Acts 4:12). This **one** Lord Jesus Christ is the only **One** who obeyed the Law of God perfectly and completely for all in the world; He is the **one** and only Savior who by His holy, sinless death paid the wages for the sins of the whole world; He did everything for us which God demanded of us; God the Father was fully satisfied with the sacrifice of His only begotten Son; He therefore forgave the sins of all for Jesus’ sake. Now, whoever believes in and receives what Jesus has done for all *“is not condemned”* (John 3:18) and has the gift of everlasting life (John 3:16).

When we speak of the *“unity of the Spirit,”* we are **NOT** speaking of the unity of the flesh, the unity of the ungodly world, the unity of false teachers and false doctrine, or the unity of opinions, people’s own thinking contrary to the Word of God.

The *“unity of the Spirit”* in our Conference is a gift from God. Let us be greatly grateful; let us work diligently to defend it, maintain it, and preserve it. God help us never to allow, permit, or tolerate divisions and offenses contrary to God’s Word to remain in our Conference. May our on-going confession be: *“We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth”* (II Corinthians 13:8).

So, the first timely reminder for orthodox Christians is that we are to keep on being diligent in preserving the unity of the Spirit. The second reminder is that we keep on being diligent in preserving the bond of peace.

II.

Our text not only says, “*Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit,*” but it also says to us: “*in the bond of peace.*” We are to be tied together in a union, in a fellowship, in a communion built on the unity of the Spirit.

Since there “*is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all*” (I Timothy 2:5-6), there is peace, good-will, and full reconciliation between God and the whole world of sinners. Second Corinthians reminds us that “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation*” (5:19). By faith in this Christ we have peace with God. Romans 5 reminds us: “*Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v. 1).

Having and enjoying this real, true, genuine peace and harmony with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, we are **equipped** to “pull out every stop” to live at peace with those around us. We are reminded of the importance of this in Romans 12: “*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*” (v. 18). Sometimes peace with others may not come to pass, not because we would not love to have such peace, but because to have that peace we would have to compromise and turn away from some clear teachings in Scripture. At times we may have no other choice but to say: “*We ought to obey God rather than man*” (Acts 5:29).

In our on-going work together in our Conference, let us use that wonderful, precious gift of full peace with God through our Savior, to constrain and impel us to do everything we possibly can to be at peace with each other without compromising or going against God’s Word. “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*” (I John 4:11).

So our text helps us, who by God’s grace in Christ Jesus are orthodox Christians, to remember the two reminders: **1)** Keep on being diligent in preserving the unity of the Spirit, and **2)** keep on being diligent in preserving the bond of peace.

“*Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*” (I Corinthians 15:57-58). Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!