

03.17.24

“How to Live in Community”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Proverbs 31:20-31 (GNT)

- ²⁰ She is generous to the poor and needy.
²¹ She doesn't worry when it snows, because her family has warm clothing.
²² She makes bedspreads and wears clothes of fine purple linen.
²³ Her husband is well known, one of the leading citizens.
²⁴ She makes clothes and belts, and sells them to merchants.
²⁵ She is strong and respected and not afraid of the future.
²⁶ She speaks with a gentle wisdom.
²⁷ She is always busy and looks after her family's needs.
²⁸ Her children show their appreciation, and her husband praises her.
²⁹ He says, “Many women are good wives, but you are the best of them all.”
³⁰ Charm is deceptive and beauty disappears, but a woman who honors the Lord should be praised.
³¹ Give her credit for all she does. She deserves the respect of everyone.

Leader: These are Guiding Words of God!

All: Thanks be to God!

Ephesians 4:1-13 (NLT)

Unity in the Body

¹ Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ⁴ For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

⁶ one God and Father of all,

who is over all, in all, and living through all.

⁷ However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. ⁸ That is why the Scriptures say,

“When he ascended to the heights,

he led a crowd of captives

and gave gifts to his people.”

⁹ Notice that it says, “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. ¹⁰ And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son

that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Leader: These Words of Paul Are for Us, Church. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Triune God, you of all wisdom, live in community – three in one, Yahweh, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. We come today in worship and leadership asking for the gift of unity and community as we attempt to live out your commandment to love you and our neighbor. We thank you Lord for your example, and praise you with singing, music, prayer, Scripture, and teaching. We also thank you for our various associations of Baptists who are better together and can do more Kingdom work together than separately. Unite us all in purpose, as you speak through this messenger this morning. Amen.

Happy Saint Patrick's Day! Wonderful to see you in green today, but I realized I never knew why we do that! Some say it has a magical leprechaun origin, but there is a Christian origin as well. Wearing green on March 17th became a tradition here in the US from many of the immigrants who came over from Ireland in the late 1800's and early 1900's who wore green that special day. It actually goes back further to the 5th century missionary, St. Patrick, because green is the color of the shamrock: "The significance of the three-leafed shamrock comes from St. Patrick himself. He used the shamrock to describe the three forms of God—the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—to convert early Irish people to Christianity (www.history.com)."

The trinity is a good way to explore the sermon title, which should be "How **Do** We Live in Community?" In 2003 when our two churches were consolidated, you spent time exploring this concept with meetings and fellowship meals. Spending time and living life together is the best way to develop commonalities and relationships. The trinity is a relationship between three in one, but so is a family even though we may

not think of family as “community.” When I say community for today’s purposes, I do not mean Annandale, Fairfax, Alexandria, or Falls Church, although they are the communities in which we minister. The term might be used in that way later. I mean our United Baptist community or congregation and extended families.

You may wonder why I’m wearing a BWIM T-shirt under my jacket. We are members of many different communities. BWIM is one community I am part of—Baptist Women in Ministry—and March is still the BWIM Month of Advocacy. Friday night several regional pastors and I had the chance to see a new documentary about how and why the organization came to be; the film illustrates through historical records how some women **were** ordained in the 1970’s and each future decade, but they met resistance; you heard some that story last week. In June, the film will be publicly released, and we’ll find a way to make it available over the summer, because it is your story too of important Baptist leaders, both men and women. We must remember our past as we step forward into the future. As we watched, we remembered our childhood in the church and the significance of Girls’ Auxiliary or Girls in Action (GA’s) to teach Missions and calling.

In that film we heard a lot about the Baptist church’s view of the Proverbs 31 woman. While she was and still is the backbone of the church, she collaborates with all members living in community to serve and do the Lord’s work. The beginning of this chapter of Proverbs was a set of instructions from King Lemuel’s mother! Be wary of the wrong sort of woman, excessive alcohol, and adultery. Verses 10-31 were lines of an acrostic Hebrew poem exalting a noble wife. She would be a

disciplined person, working hard for her family, and shrewd in matters of budgeting and business. She is selfless and generous, giving to the poor and those in need. She makes her family's clothing and linens. These characteristics historically helped her husbands' standing in society, herself having dignity and strength, wisdom (vs. 26), and faith. She is loved and respected by her husband and children. Her Godly character is her real charm because she fears the Lord and follows him. For many years in the church and in society, these verses were used to hold women back from professional occupations. That is not true today; and we know that God gifted each human with special gifts and talents that can be used in all areas of life, not just the home. We also know that raising a family is a noble calling, and that equality and respect are what a Godly community demonstrates.

In our second passage, Paul writes to the Ephesians about the need for unity during times of persecution. He first shows that their unity is rooted in Christ's love; then they are called to walk together and respect one another's spiritual gifts by working together to share the Gospel, what I call collaboration. He used the word "worthy" (Greek: *axios*) which means equal weight or equal value. A Christian conduct depends on one's personal salvation and the person's responsibility to other believers in the church, an accountability. Paul mentions several virtues to enhance a believer's walk: humility, gentleness (being meek never angry or aggressive), patience (endurance never giving up), and bearing with one another to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of relationship.

He then connects these qualities to the three persons of the Trinity, reminding his readers/hearers that they (and we) are one body, the universal church, one spirit (led by the Holy Spirit) as called by the one true God, and in that three we have one hope, who is Christ our salvation. Community is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God the father of all.

The rest of that chapter is really the “how;” each believer functions in Christ’s body (the church community) according to God’s empowerment and provision of spiritual gifts. We have taught about the variety of gifts before; this is the Five-Fold Ministry we studied in 2021: some are prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, all to prepare God’s people for service. Equipping the body of Christ and becoming equipped at this time and in our culture (not what we learned years ago, but how to apply that now) is what defines a Baptist! This equipping which we do every Sunday allows churches to associate with each other (and not compete) to do more together than apart. Some churches are skilled in disaster recovery, some in youth mission trips, some in grief support, some in Administration. Our giftings have changed, but we still exhibit the gifts of hospitality. The Food Pantry will be an outward demonstration of that gift of generosity. This church has a deep heritage and legacy of pastoral care and hospitality; these things unite us in Christian love. That is beauty, to me, even if you do not think of it as beauty. Remember our key verses from Philippians 4:8-9:

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. ^{NIV}

How can we own and honor the beauty and loveliness of serving others? By supporting and encouraging one another, getting along with one another, building up our church and mission center friends. By living and working with one another in community, unified toward our purpose and mission to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him. Amen! || *Let us pray.*

Oh God of beauty and gifting, we thank you for our legacy and are challenged by our culture. Help us in this time of Lent to support one another in our ministry callings and build us up in our leadership skills. Educate us; give us patience, more time, good health, strong support, and courage to share the Gospel. May we pray in Jesus' name, **Amen.**