

'FELLOWSHIP, THE INWARD COMMUNITY'

"All for one, and one for all, united we stand, divided we fall"

What, you may ask, has a quote from "The Three Musketeers" got to do with our subject today? St. Paul, were he to be writing his letters today, would I think, be considering using it to help make the point he frequently emphasises. As a church community we need each other. The life in Christ is to be shared with others, our Christian fellowship, who have different strengths and abilities; together, with Christ as the Head, we can stand against all powers that oppose.

Read Ephesians 4:1-7.

This extract from Paul's letter has teaching and challenges not only for individual Christians, but, primarily for our consideration now, corporately as a church community. It is a gift of God's grace that we have been given unity, unity with everyone who accepts Jesus as Lord (v.5), though church history exposes our collective failures.

'It's a given', is a common expression today, but what do you consider to be 'a given' in terms of God's grace?

Do you think we have a role to guard and maintain this unity? If so, how do we go about this?

Read Ephesians 4:11-16

Paul writes (v12) that we are to work corporately "that the body of Christ ... {is to build up} ... to reach unity in faith ... in knowledge ... and become mature."

Paul, when he talks of maturity, he is obviously not referring to age, but how would you describe someone who is mature in their faith?

Are we all called to strive towards maturity in our unity and faith? How do we help our fellow church members grow in maturity?

Read Colossians 3:12-17 "Strength lies in differences, not in similarities" (Stephen R. Covey).

Do you think the above quote is applicable within 'the body of Christ'? If so, can you give examples where unity and/or maturity has grown from differences?

Do you feel that immature Christians are more or less vulnerable to the struggles of growing in unity and faith than when you committed to Christ? How can you help?

Verses 12-14 talk of how we can, by God's grace, achieve many of the challenges and actions re unity and maturity. Verses 15-17 invite us to allow God's peace and love wash over us, be absorbed into us, and to be thankful. I suggest taking a few minutes to do just that.

Prayer: *Lord God, bless the family of our church. May we accept one another as brothers and sisters, finding strength and joy in our life together. Help us to see each other with the same loving eyes you see us. We give thanks that you journey with us. Amen.*