

Our Life Together

Romans 12:5

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

We have often talked together about the primary meaning of Jesus' death. That is the primary meaning of that clause in the Bible, "Christ died for our sins." [1 Corinthians 15:3] You remember how we put it. God, before he ever created the world, foresaw the way things would go after the creation. He foresaw how each one of us, individually and together as a race, would so live that we would pervert our psychological and physical natures. Knowing that, in that realm of eternity which is not really before or after, but is in that realm of timelessness beyond before or after, He put us all into his Son in that timelessness which is called eternity and he destroyed us in his Son's death and remade us all in his resurrection. That is the primary meaning of Jesus' death--that all of us, individually and as a race of human beings, have been remade by God in his Son. We have been recreated in him. It is the real meaning of clauses like "He made him to be sin who knew no sin" [2 Corinthians 5:21] and "If one (Christ) died for all; therefore all have died." [2 Corinthians 5:14]

We have often shared how it is the secondary meaning of his death that we talk about in Christendom. That secondary meaning is, "Now if God loved us so much that he put us in his Son and required his Son to bear the pain of destroying our miserable, exploiting emotions and manipulating minds, then surely he must forgive us for what these perverted personalities have produced." Of course he does. Obviously he does. There never was any question of God's love. The question was always how he would rescue us from the mess we had made of our own personalities here on earth. So the primary meaning of Jesus' death is that each one of us here is now free, free either to live as poor little independent individuals, hacking life out as best we can, trying to get some security for ourselves somehow or other and ending up like the bulk of mankind making a terrible mess of it. Or, we are free to accept reality--that we are actually part of the Son of God, the Creator of the world returning to earth to complete his creation through us. We have that choice now. The reality is we are part of the Son of God who has returned to earth in you, in his own Spirit, to complete his creation.

That is the statement of our Creator to us this morning in the verse we are studying. Romans 12:5. "So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." Why? Because God, by mighty fiat and by spiritual, miraculous acts, has put us in his Son. We are all one together because the Creator has put us into his Son Jesus, and that is actual fact. Like all eternal realities it keeps bursting through, even for those of us who don't actually believe it. That is the crazy thing. The fact is, the more you believe that reality and accept it, the more right you feel in your life and the more at peace you are. The amazing thing about eternal reality is that what God has done for everyone of us who has ever lived and will ever live, that reality keeps bursting through to try to get us to realize that it is true and to try to get us to allow its transformation to change us so that we can live forever with God. That reality that we are all actually one together in Jesus, that we have all been made one together, keeps bursting through.

Every time you get knocked off your perch it bursts through. Our perch is we are gods in control of our little world. Every time we get knocked off our perch, our oneness, built in by God in Jesus, breaks through. In a time of grief--your mom or your dad dies, or some loved one dies that is dear to you, or a domestic tragedy hits your family in some way. You know the way we put our arms around each other. You know the way we at once express--what? We express what we are. What you are comes

out at a time of pressure or tension. That is why so many of us who know Britain are bewildered at the riots. Even those of us who were young in the Second World War know the sense of oneness that came when we were all knocked off our perch. Suddenly we were no longer in control of our world, and it was then that there was a great thrusting of our arms round one another. It comes to us when you catch a glimpse of the courage of the Creator or the magnanimity of the Creator in a fellow like Reagan [Ronald Reagan, former president of USA] when he is shot. He is joking with the nurses and all that kind of thing and his seeming to rise above the thing. Or Pope John Paul. We see somebody who expresses some of the beauty of God, and when something happens we all feel one, and there is a great oneness expressed in our sympathy and our empathy.

Loved ones, it is not because it is created on the spot. It is not. It is because what you and I deeply are in the base ground of eternity comes out when we are knocked off these silly little perches of our God-postures when we pretend that we are in charge and can make it on our own. It is the same in humor, whether it is Bob Hope or whoever. For a moment when the joke is cracked you forget yourself, and you know the sense of unity we have together. We all laugh together and feel one together. Why? Because we are touching the laughter that is at the heart of our God, because all things He sees to be well in his Son. So, that oneness in Jesus keeps breaking through.

Now it is true that Satan has a counterfeit unity that he tries to create in this world. He does that because he is trying to keep you and me from living in reality. Reality is that we are one together in Jesus, and Satan wants to keep us from living in that. He creates his own counterfeit realities here on earth to try to get us to refuse the position that God has given us in his Son Jesus. You know them and I know them. One of them is an ungodly emphasis on family that many of us experience at different times in our lives. There is a godly emphasis on family, but there is an ungodly emphasis on family that is a creation of counterfeit unity by Satan. It is the superficial unity that is imposed upon us when our mother or father exhorts us, "Look, it is a jungle out there. Nobody cares for you out there like the members of your own family so remember that." That is a counterfeit unity that Satan expresses. You can see it is from Satan because of its fruits. It often produces love-hate relationships between parents and children, and it produces that kind of possessive love that dominates and domineers. It produces that kind of attitude that often leaves parents and children emotional cripples for life. So that is a counterfeit sense of unity.

Some husband-wife relationships or high school crushes or those claustrophobic relationships that are based on confidential secrets, those are counterfeit unities that Satan tries to produce to keep us from living the great, freeing, bighearted family that we have been made in Jesus. Repeatedly you and I come up against those attempts at unity that are intended to keep us from experiencing our reality in Jesus. How do you avoid those counterfeit unities and how do you live in the reality of Jesus? There are two silly answers that maybe it is worth sharing with you, so that you see the true answer for each silly answer.

One silly answer is--you pray for unity. Many people think that is a very holy thing to do. We should pray that Jesus' body would be one. We should pray that all Christians will be united. It comes out in a body where people pray that the body will be united. Why is that silly? Because it is a basic unbelief in what God has already done in Jesus. I remember Martyn Lloyd-Jones saying years ago in London's Westminster Chapel, "It is praying that a unity will be created that has already been created." God already has made us one in Jesus. Jesus doesn't pray that unity will be created. Do you know that? Many of us think he does. Look at John 17:11: "And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me that they may be one, even as we are one." Jesus prays, "Father, you put them into me

and into yourself. Keep them in us." He prays that the unity that we already have in Jesus will be preserved, kept and expressed, and that it will not be rejected.

Actually, you know that. If you meet a child of God who bears the family resemblance, whether they are Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian or whatever, you feel one with them immediately. That oneness is built into Jesus. Loved ones, the answer to the question, "How do you avoid the counterfeit unities of Satan and enter into the reality of the real unity in Jesus?" is to be what you are. Be in Jesus. Simply be. Live that. Augustine said, "In non-essentials charity, in essentials unity." That big-heartedness that knows the Christ-likeness in the other's heart, whether they agree on every issue or not; that attitude that Wesley had when he said, "Forget all the things that we may disagree on; if your heart be as my heart, then give me your hand." The unity already exists. We are in Jesus. Just be what we are.

Another silly answer is, "Really concentrate on each other. Preoccupy yourself with each other, and that will increase the unity among us. Be interested in making each other feel one with each other; concentrate on talking about that unity in every way possible; have meetings to forward that unity; have little projects that you can do together that bring you together."

Loved ones, that is not the way these hands feel part of each other. They don't feel part of each other by congratulating each other, by stroking each other. They don't feel one because they arrange for meetings. And they don't feel one by saying, "Let's do something together to make us feel one." "OK, we will lift this Bible. There." "Oh, I feel one!" They don't. This one hand feels so close to this other hand because it listens to the head. They end up working together, complimenting each other and filling out each other's inadequacies because they are both listening to the head. That is God's plan.

The more we listen to the head, the more we will feel one together, the oneness that is true and real and eternal whether we feel it or not. That is what God says in Ephesians 4:15-16. "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up-builds itself in love." We experience unity when each of us is doing the thing that Jesus wants to do through us. Then we feel that oneness in Christ that is real. That's true.

There is a great difference between Satan's counterfeit unity in pagan religions and the real unity in Jesus. The counterfeit unity in pagan religions stops at the first half of the verse that we are talking about. In Buddhism or Hinduism or spiritualism or pantheism, in all the theisms, the unity stops in the first half of Romans 12:5: "So we, though many, are one body in Christ." That is their teaching.

The rain falls down upon the river and the river flows into the ocean. Then the sun makes the water evaporate and rise up to the sky and then it comes down as rain into the river and then the river flows into the ocean and you experience "OM" that great sense of absorption in the deity. That is it, isn't it? You experience absorption in the deity. So Satan's pagan religions certainly emphasize unity, but it is a unity that wipes you out completely. You sink into nothingness in the deity; you lose your individuality, your identity, your sense of personal being. You see how different God's unity is in the second half of the verse. "So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

In other words, Jesus has come back into his world bigger than he was in Galilee. You are his finger, you are his nail, you are his thumb, you are his arm, you are his leg, you are his tongue, you are his tooth. Jesus is in you and the more you are yourself, the more he is here. That is what it means--we are individually members of Jesus. The more you are what he wants you to be, the more he is alive. But in Hinduism or Buddhism it is the more passive you are, the more you are wiped out, the more you are nothingness, the greater the god is. That is why you find such passivity in those lands; that is why you find such social irresponsibility there. Do you see that God has put you in his Son, but his Son will express himself through you in a unique and individual way? Actually we will feel our oneness the more we do what we are put here to do.

Brothers and sisters, a lot of you are just spoiling your lives because you are trying to be like all the rest of us. That is part of why you feel so empty at times; that is part of why you feel so unimportant and useless. You are just making a fool of life. You are trying to be like the rest of us and you are not made to be like the rest of us, and God doesn't expect you to be like the rest of us. God expects you to be you. He wants his Son to live his life over again in you in the way that you live it. You will do it differently from the rest of us. Have you ever thought how miserable it would be if we were all like you? I have certainly thought how it would be if we were all like me. It would be terrible! We would be worn out. We each need to be what God has made us and the more we are that, the more we will feel our oneness together. So you don't have to be afraid--"Now wait a minute, I'll rock the boat if I do what I really think I should do." For goodness sake, do what you really think you should do. Risk it! God is good. If it is far out, he will tell you. He wouldn't let you go way out and get lost. But he does want you to begin to do that.

Now, I'll tell you why, if you go back to Ephesians 4:16. It is taught very plainly there. "From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up builds itself in love." We all grow in our oneness together when each part is working properly. How does each part work properly? Go back to verse 15: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." That is it.

How do you know what to do in this life? I'll listen to the head. Jesus will tell you. The vocation guidance counsellors are OK; they help a little. The ACT [American aptitude tests in secondary education] helps a little and the Minnesota Multiphasic helps a little. But finally there is only one dear One who knows why you are here and what you are to do, and that is the dear Savior who made you.

Loved ones, get to know him. Talk with him and do what he tells you to do. If he tells you to wash this floor every week, then wash the floor every week. If he tells you to invest in the stock market and make a fortune, then do that. If he tells you to be an unknown little person sitting at a typewriter day after day, typing the same wretched things. Then do that because he has something for you there that only you can express. Do whatever he tells you and relax in that.

That is the truth that we read in the book that we often think of as the writing of an old cynic--Ecclesiastes. Look at Ecclesiastes 3:10-13, "I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; also that it is God's gift to man that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil."

There is a business that God has given you to be busy with, and he alone can tell you that. Your mom and dad can't tell you it, I can't tell you it, your friends can't tell you it, your employer can't tell you it, but your dear God knows it, and He will tell you it. If you busy yourself with that with all your heart and do it as unto him and do it because he tells you, then not only will you yourself be fulfilled, but you will begin to sense that you are part of Jesus and part of the Creator returning to his world.

You may say, "Well, that is what we all do." No, I think we all do all kinds of other things. In Ecclesiastes 6:7, he talks about those who don't live that way. "All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied." I think a lot of us have that attitude. "Wait a minute. All that is OK for you. It is theory, but I'm going for the thing that gets me food for my stomach and bread for my mouth to eat. I'm going for the job that makes the most money." That is how we get ourselves into slavery. Many of us spend our lives in quiet desperation because we will not go out on a limb and believe that God will add all things unto us that we need if we seek first his kingdom and do what we believe he sent us here to do.

Loved ones, that is the only truth. We all admire Luther--"Here I stand; I can do no other"--but because that was Jesus speaking. You are in Jesus and you are yourself when you are like that in your own life, not when you do something because it makes you money or because it keeps the wolf from the door. God will keep the wolf from the door if you will get to know him. "Lord Jesus, I know I'm in you because God put me in you. Now what do you want to do here? What do you want to do with this body of mine?"

The writer points to another way we operate in Ecclesiastes 4:4: "Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind." A lot of us do that. A lot of us look at somebody else and envy them and want to be like them. You would not believe how many of us are doing jobs because somebody else was doing it and we wanted to be like them. How many of us do things because we envy somebody else? Stop it! "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of him."

Be what you are. Be the beautiful, different person you are. Have courage, whether that makes you known or unknown, whether that makes you prosperous or unprosperous, whether that makes you married or single, whether that makes you happy or unhappy. Be what God has made you in his Son. If you are asking, "How do I find out?", on the whole, be what is at the depth of your heart. It is very ordinary. Be what is at the depth of your heart. Just relax, stop thinking of doing a job or doing something to make money. Stop thinking of doing a job to please somebody else or because you envy somebody else, and just say, "You know what I really would like to do." It should not be surprising that when you get rid of all the false motives, the Savior in whom God has placed you will speak forth and let you know. Then do that. The beautiful thing about God is, he is natural; he works naturally. I would pray for everyone here who is in all kinds of ridiculous contortions because of their false motives. I would pray that you would start being what you are--part of Jesus come back to earth--and he is going to miss you if you make a fool of yourself. He is!

Let us pray.

Dear Savior we are overwhelmed by the fact that we are part of you. Yet we see that is the whole meaning of the Bible. Our Father put us into you and we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members together. We thank you for that fact built into eternity. We thank you we have

been placed in you, each one of us here. We thank you, Lord, for the obvious fact that our fingers look different from our toes. We thank you that our ears are different from our noses. We thank you, Lord, that every finger here in this room is different from every other finger. So we thank you that you have made it plain to us by our unique individuality that you have us here to do something different from everyone else.

So, Lord, we cast away all these false motives -- making money and trying to keep the wolf from the door. Lord, we see that that is unbelief. We believe you will keep your promise that you will add all other things unto us. Lord, we will throw away all those foolish motives we've had for doing jobs because our brother did it, or because our father did it. We'll throw away all envy. Lord Jesus we will relax with you and grow up into you and say, "Lord, what do you want to do here while I am here on this earth?" Lord Jesus, we know as we listen to you more each day your voice will get louder until we find the glorious freedom of being an individual whom the Father loves because we are ourselves. Lord, we thank you.

We pray for each other. We commit ourselves to helping each other come into this so that the oneness of Jesus' body will be seen in all its beautiful diversity.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship be with each one of us now and forever. Amen.