



Last week, when looking at the first chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, Ruth talked about how joy is deeply relational, and how we can find joy through deep relationships with fellow Christians when we are partners together in the gospel. Our theme this week is unity, the perfect follow-on. For unity is all about having deep relationships with fellow Christians and partnering with them in the work of the gospel. Paul says knowing the Philippian Christians are united will make his joy complete. Read Philippians chapter 2.

What is unity? Look at verse 2. First, being like-minded means being in agreement on the truth, the truth of Jesus Christ, for Jesus said "I am the truth, the way and the life". Secondly, we need the same type of love. And what type of love, but God's love. And finally being one in spirit and of one mind, speaks of being united in purpose, united in one mission, to grow God's kingdom here and now. For us to be united everyone needs to be involved, because we each have something vital to offer to this community and to the work of God.

Why is unity so important?

1. Because God is united: Paul opens this passage on unity by reminding us that God is unity, that God is Trinity. When we are united in truth and love and purpose, therefore, we reflect God to the world.
2. Because when we're united we become like Jesus: unity does not come naturally to us. It's hard work. Look at verse 3 for Paul's advice. This doesn't mean thinking less of yourself, but rather following the example of Jesus (v 6-8). Jesus knew who he was but he chose to humble himself in order to rescue us by his life and death on a cross, so that we could be united with him and his Father; free to enjoy God forever.
3. Because we're called to be united: elsewhere Paul uses various metaphors to describe the church (building, bride, body). We each have something vital to offer to this community, something unique. So don't hold back!
4. And because when we're united we can light up the world: look at verse 14. When we shine together we can light up our generation and people will take notice.

Growing in Unity

First we need to pursue deep relationships with one another and grow in love, as we focus together on Jesus. Secondly we need to join together in the mission of God, in the mission of the church. Don't be a grumbler or a complainer, get involved, there are hundreds of different ways you can serve here. And don't hold back. God has made you specially and placed you here for a purpose. You have something to offer this church and its witness to our community that no one else can offer.

Questions for discussion:

1. "Unity does not mean uniformity". In your group, how much diversity can you identify (e.g. leisure interests, taste in music, where you were born/brought up, jobs, ideal holiday destination...)
2. Look again at verse 2. Identify the things by or in which we are to be united. How easy or difficult is this sort of unity to achieve and why?
3. What could verses 3 and 4 look like in practice in our church? What is the link to unity, or lack of it?
4. Verses 6 to 11 are some of the best known in Philippians, but how do they relate to the rest of the chapter?
5. Look at verses 14-16. What is there about our behaviour and attitudes that will enable our "shining like stars" to be less like the light-polluted night sky of Dorking and more like the stunning view of the Milky Way to be seen in Africa?
6. Paul mentions two individuals, Timothy and Epaphroditus (vv19-30). How can each be a role model to us as we seek to build deeper relationships with one another?