

Rev Shaun Arndt
Sunday, September 19, 2022
Ecclesiastes 4:7-12
Pentecost 15

The Beauty of Together

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

You probably can't see it, but I am holding a length of light fishing line. I don't have to pull all that hard... and it snaps apart.

But if I take three pieces of that same easily broken line and put them together.... (tries to pull apart) ...it's not going to happen! What is easily destroyed by itself, stands strong when it's together with the others.

This is of course the powerful truth in our lesson from Ecclesiastes: **Though an attacker can overpower one person, two people *together* can stand up against him. A rope with three strands is not quickly snapped.**

So there is benefit when people work together! This truth could be applied to all kinds of situations, but when we apply it to the congregation, to this group of believers the Lord has brought

together here at Peace, I pray we will not just see benefit, but **beauty – The Beauty of Together.**

The opening verses of our reading show the miserable, polar opposite of **together: There was a single person all alone without even a son or a brother... His eyes also were not satisfied with wealth. “So for whom am I working so hard... and depriving myself of enjoyment?”**

Now when it says **single person** understand that this isn't talking about not being married, but is talking about a person who has no one at all– no family, no friends, no meaningful relationships to share the joys and sorrows of life.

Of course a major part of the problem here is that **person** is only concerned about himself, seeking to find his **satisfaction** in his money and yet no matter how much he has it does not still the longing of the soul.

One of the key themes of Ecclesiastes is that you cannot find true and lasting peace, meaning or purpose in yourself, what you can, do or in the things of things of this world. Everything that is purely of this sin ruined world “**under the sun**” will ultimately fail and fade away like the cloud of breath from your mouth you see disappear on a cold day that disappears before your eyes.

By the way, if you replace **wealth** of that miserable man in our lesson and instead have his **eyes** staring **unsatisfied** at a

screen... then you have a good picture of our entertainment and pleasure driven that promises so much but leave us so empty no matter how much we have or scroll.

Even good things become bad when we look for them to give what only God can do. True, eternal lasting peace and **satisfaction** comes only in Jesus Christ, not in self-discovery, not in trends, sports, politics, money, stuff, not even relationships of themselves. Only in the promises of God's Word do we have treasures that will never fade away for all eternity!

Now the believer who knows that only Jesus gives peace is the one who can rightly use and enjoy God's blessings in this world, blessing like being together with our fellow believers.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their hard work. Certainly this describes how you can get more quickly done with **two** or more people working together at task.

It's much easier for several people to stack the chairs and set up the school lunch room than for one person to do it alone. Or consider how our congregation alone could not run a college and seminary to train pastors and teachers, but we can when we work **together** with thousands of fellow believers in our church-body, the WELS.

But the **good reward** in this verse is more than just efficiency or productivity. The **reward** of working together can include the joy of comradery and a shared sense of accomplishment. There's a joy of a young child eager to help with the task because they want to serve Jesus too! It can include being able to laugh at ourselves or to commiserate when things don't go as planned.

If one of them falls, his companion can lift him up.

Together, we can help each other out. I think of members who send a card to someone who has been sick or in the hospital, or people who have donated gift cards to be given anonymously to congregation members who are in need. I think of a Christian friend gently inviting back to worship someone they haven't seen in worship for a long time, letting them know they are missed and how important it is to hear Jesus' voice together.

I also think of the pastor comforting the dying member with the good news of the Savior. I don't mention this to pat Pastor Werre or myself on the back, but to point out this is another way you are there to life up your fellow congregation members, since with your offerings and prayers and encouragement you support the work of your pastors and teachers who are carrying out their gospel work on your behalf.

Today your fellow believer may need you, tomorrow you may need them. Remember the fishing line. Alone each piece is easily broken, but together that ***rope with three strands is not quickly snapped.*** We need others and others need us!

Even the words about **warmth** apply to our congregation if we think of **warmth** in the sense of welcoming, encouraging and supporting each other. I think of how members who have known each other for years greet each other or speak words of encouragement when the others are struggling.

But don't think this can't apply to you if you don't know many of your fellow believers here at Peace. Understand even if you don't think anyone knows you right now, your Peace family is praying for you, here in worship and throughout the week, in fact, they can't help it, since Jesus did not teach us to pray *My Father in Heaven...* but *Our Father in heaven!*

Just look around – in a world full of unbelief and cynicism, and all the attacks of the devil, here you are with others who believe that the Bible is the truth, the very Word of God and that Jesus is the only way we are saved – dear friends that is *rare* in this world! And then remember what we confessed in creed – these fellow believers, just like you only believe these things by the miracle of God the Holy Spirit! Be warmed that you are here with fellow miracles of God.

And be “warmed” the blessing of (often) having little children in our worship with those blessed moments when you hear that toddler who has started to grasp the liturgy and says that cute little “Amen” about half a moment too late—oh that's beautiful! And don't forget, since the Bible says: **from the lips of little**

babies the Lord has prepared praise (Ps 8:2, Mt. 21:16), some of those sounds we hear from the babies must be praise to God!

Now of course it takes effort to get to know others and be there for them. It means stepping out of our comfort zone, maybe even giving up talking to those we already know this week so that we can speak to that person we don't know yet!

Dear friends let's try to be ok with being a little awkward and introducing yourself to that person you've seen 100 times and feel you should know their name, and let's be patient with that person who doesn't recognize you, even if you have gone to the same service for years! But let's also respect that fellow believer who is shy, loving, supporting and praying for them at more of a distance.

Oh, there is a great **beauty**, an amazing gift from God when the family of believers is **together**.

But of course, there is also sin. Just like every congregation you can read about in the Bible, we are not perfect because are not in heaven yet.

And so we do not always appreciate the gifts God gives us in our fellow believers, nor do we show one another the patience, kindness and love we ought!

Instead, we sometimes get on each other's nerves. Sometimes we say foolish things that hurt each other. Sometimes we have and will hurt and disappoint each.

And then Satan uses such things to try to make us shocked that a fellow believer would sin against us and lead us to not want to have anything to do with church! Now don't get me wrong, we should never be okay with the fact that we often sin against each other.

But if we believe God's Word, we shouldn't be shocked at such things! Not when we confess week after week in worship how we are sinful by nature, sinful through and through, that we all desperately need forgiveness! That is true of your pastors, and that's true of you, and that's true of that other church member who has hurt or disappointed you.

Let us confess this ugly sinful truth about each and every one of us and repent of it. And then, by God's mercy, look to Jesus, to the Lord who not only has brought us together into His Church, but is the only one who makes His Church truly **beautiful**.

Yes, the beauty of the Church is only found only in our God, in this Lord who knows our every sinful word, our every lack of love in action, and every self-centered thought of our hearts.

Yes, Jesus knows every reason we have to be ashamed, and yet as we heard in our 2nd lesson, *He was not ashamed* to call us

family! And so the Son of God became our brother, sharing our flesh and blood, perfectly living a life of love in fellowship in your place and mine.

Jesus, could have left us to everlasting miserable loneliness of hell, but instead said Christ said: 'I'll be the one who saves them from themselves!'

And so He took all the guilt, the punishment, and the unworthiness of your sin and mine and carried it to the cross where He endured the hellish isolation of being forsaken by His Father in order to pay for our sins.

But risen from the dead He lives to keep His promise not only to forgive us, take His believers to heaven and raise our bodies of His believers up at the last day, but because He lives you will never be alone, for your Savior is by your side every day!

This Lord ruled history so that in Baptism you would be clothed with the holy life He lived in your place and so made perfect and blameless in the sight of God, made an heir of the perfect and endless joy and friendship we will have in heaven.

Because of Jesus and only because of Jesus, we have forgiveness and a place in the family of God! That is true of your pastors, and that's true of you, and that's true of that other church member who has hurt or disappointed you.

Jesus is the reason Our Peace Family is truly **beautiful together** –beautiful through his love and forgiveness for us that saves us and gives us power to love, forgive and serve each other in the **Beauty of Together** *in Christ*. Amen.