

Our gospel text for this morning comes from Jesus' priestly prayer which He prayed the night before His Death on the cross. He addressed His Father in heaven **asking that the disciples might remain faithful to the world** which He had given them, asked that they might **remain faithful to the Father**, asked that they might **remain together as a group, or fellowship of believers**. **This prayer is named His priestly prayer**, because Jesus was praying on behalf of the disciples to His Father in heaven in the same way a priest in the Old Testament would offer intercession on behalf of the nation of Israel.

As Jesus prays for the disciples, a few verses ring out loud and clear for us this morning as these verses 7,8, 9, 10 focus on the fellowship which Jesus wanted to establish between His disciples, between His disciples and the Father, and the loving and caring which would bind that fellowship together. Listen again to Jesus' words as **He charges the disciples and us to live in that loving fellowship.....**

⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

Do you sense the togetherness, the unity, the union, Jesus hopes and prays for in this prayer as He prays for His disciples and all those who would be His followers today???

Our second lesson picks up that theme of TOGETHERNESS and brings to it the reality that life as a follower of Jesus is not easy. Peter speaks about the suffering, the brokenness that is in this world, the brokenness that all followers of Jesus Christ will encounter at one time or another as he or she walks with Christ. Peter ties the glory, the richness, the unity of the Christian community with the reality that, that community lives in a broken and less than perfect world.

He says in verses 6-11 ***6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.***

As we look at these two interwoven themes, we see that because of the love and fellowship, because of the brokenness we encounter in this world---there is a definite obligation for us as followers of Christ to uphold, to pull-together, to encourage, to comfort, to be there for ONE ANOTHER AS FELLOW MEMBERS of the community. We are CALLED TO CHEER ON AND LOVE ONE ANOTHER--as we bind ourselves together in this community of Christ, known as the CHURCH.

Maybe this idea of unity, togetherness, caring, upholding will be made clearer by the following story entitled: "Who Flew the Kite??"

"Who Flew the Kite?" "I did," said the sticks, "I did," said the paper. "I did," said the boy. "No, I did," said the wind. "

But they all flew the kite together. If the sticks had broken, the tail caught in a tree, the paper torn or the wind had lulled, the kite would have come down. Each had a part to play. The application is inescapable, each have a work to do. If the work of the Lord is to be a success, then all parts must be played by every member of the fellowship, every member of the community. We have to work as a community in visiting, giving, preaching and countless other jobs to make the church and its work successful. We must all work together and each do what he or she can to help.

IT IS A MATTER OF TEAMWORK

Paul emphasizes this in I Corinthians 3:6-9 as he says.... *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."*

These two interwoven themes of **FELLOWSHIP & CARING** are the basis of our scripture, but time does not permit us to look at them both.

I would like to look at one of those themes this morning. FELLOWSHIP.

Maybe the best way for me to describe what I mean by fellowship... *"fellowship with Christ" and "fellowship with one another"* is to tell you a story I RAN ACROSS YEARS AGO. "A senior executive of one of the largest banks in New York told how he had risen to a place of prominence and influence. At first he served as an office boy, then one day, the president of the company called him aside and said, *"I want you to come into my office and be with me each day."* The young man replied, *"But what could I do to help you, sir? I don't know anything about finances." Never mind that!!! You will learn what I want to teach you a lot faster if you just stay by my side and keep your eyes and ears open."* That was the most significant experience of my life," said the now famous banker. *"Being with that wise man made me just like him. I began to do things the way he did, and that accounts for what I am today."*

I would like to suggest that fellowship in the community of Christ means "rubbing elbows" with Jesus Christ on a daily basis and also "rubbing elbows" with other Christians so that one's faith may be strengthened, may be upheld, may be watered, may grow as God would will it to grow. Fellowship in the community of Christ is for us a strong foundation as we walk our Christian Journey. It is that fellowship which encourages us to stay in the word of Christ, live as Christ would have us live. I know right now that is DIFFICULT, as we are separated, but we have a strong foundation, a foundation that calls us to draw strength From the Word, draw strength from Prayer, draw strength from each other in whatever way we can!!

Do You Remember That Well Known Song... *"Blest be the tie that Binds,"* we sometimes sing. Well, there is such a tie. And it is blest.

In the primitive church that tie was very strong. The first **Christians** were an island community in a vast, hostile sea. **Fellowship** was precious, and there was strength in it.

A follower of Christ, meeting a stranger on the road, and not knowing if that stranger was a **Christian** or of some hostile camp, would often with his staff make the shape of a fish or a cross in the dust at his feet, watching for any reaction from the other. If the stranger registered no recognition of these secret signals, then the conversation moved in casual channels, and soon each person went on his way. But if that sign was identified, there was an embrace and a great rejoicing there on the road: a **Christian** had met a **Christian**!

O, how those people needed one another! How very much that **fellowship** meant to them! Should our **fellowship** with one another mean any less to us? In worship together we share the **fellowship** which is ours in Christ, and we give thanks to God for our fellows of this Faith whom he has given to us - with whom we can travel awhile, and of whose strength we can partake as they walk beside us in the way

The fellowship of this community in Christ is very important for our faith and daily living.

We need each other's faith as we journey DOWN the road of life. **I need your faith to strengthen my faith and you need my faith to strengthen yours.** WE NEED TO RUB ELBOWS!! **We need each other's faith,** we need to share it WITH each other, We need to discuss it, to pray about it, to rejoice in it.

WE NEED TO BE A COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN THIS DAY AND THE NEXT DAY. NO “LONE RANGERS.” WE NEED EACH OTHER—PERIOD!

Jesus said in vss 9-10, *“I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those Who you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in Them.”*

YES, IT IS “TOGETHER” THAT WE GLORIFY GOD AND FIND COMPLETENESS WITH ONE ANOTHER. IT’S LIKE THIS STORY...

Have you ever wondered what makes the difference between a spotlight and a laser beam? How can a medium-powered laser burn through steel in a matter of seconds, while the most powerful spotlight can only make it warm? Both may have the same electrical power requirements. **THE DIFFERENCE IS UNITY...**

A laser can be simply described as a medium of excited molecules with mirrors at each end.

Some of the excited molecules naturally decay into a less excited state.

In the decay process they release a photon, a particle of light.

It is here that the unique process of the laser begins.

The photon moves along and “tickles” another molecule, inviting another photon to join him on his journey.

Then these two photons “tickle” two more molecules and invite two more photons to join the parade.

Soon there is a huge army of photons marching in step with each other.

It is this unity that gives the laser its power.

A spotlight may have just as many photons, but each is going its own independent way, occasionally interfering with other photons. As a result, much of its power is wasted and cannot be focused to do any useful work.

However, the laser, because of its unity, is like an army marching in tight formation and is able to focus all its power on its objective-THUS GETTING THE JOB DONE!!

AND WHAT ABOUT YOU TODAY? CAN YOU FOCUS ALL YOUR ENERGY, WITH THE HELP OF JESUS... ON UNITY TODAY? COME ON... YOU CAN’T JOIN HANDS-YOU CAN’T RUB ELBOWS... BUT YOU CAN PRAY...SO PRAY, YES, PRAY...PRAY FOR EACH OTHER AND FEEL THE “POWER!!!” CAN YOU FEEL THE POWER?

CAN YOU FEEL THE EXCITED STATE....REMEMBER, ALL THAT IS HIS, IS YOURS, SO BRING YOUR PRAYERS TO HIM, RUB ELBOWS WITH JESUS AND THOSE THAT YOU CAN, AND YES, MAKE THIS WORLD A BETTER PLACE TOGETHER. Amen.