



LIFE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS  
FINAL WEEK!

## Living as One?

SUNDAY, MAY 29, 2022  
COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sermon for Sunday, May 29, 2022  
“Living as One?” | Seventh Sunday of Easter  
Pastor Charlie Berthoud | John 17:20-26

“Life in All Its Fullness” has been our theme this Easter season, as we ponder resurrection and reflect on the words of Jesus in John 10 when he said, “I have come that they might have life in all its fullness.” Other translations call it “life in abundance.” *The Message* describes it as “real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”

Jesus came to offer us this life, to invite us to wake up and live with purpose and clarity.

Next Sunday and through the summer, we’re inviting you to learn a memory Bible verse each week. If you’ve been worshipping with us the last several weeks, you probably already have a memory verse: “Jesus said, ‘I came that they might have life, and have it in all its fullness.’”

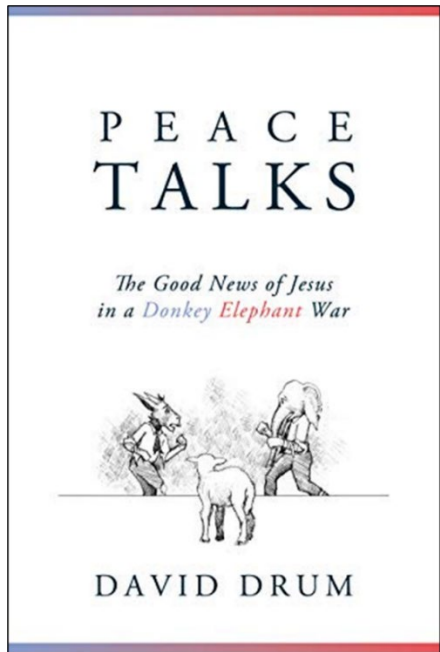
The lectionary readings in these weeks of Easter have given us some guidance in how to live this life, how to move toward “life in all its fullness.”

Most of our readings have come from the section of John’s gospel known as “the farewell discourse” in chapters 13-17. If you have a red-letter Bible where all the words of Jesus are in red, you see a LOT of red in chapters 13 through 17.

In these chapters, Jesus teaches us to love one another, to humbly serve each other, to welcome the peace of God, to know that he is the vine and we are the branches, and to know that we are his friends.

After many teachings in John 13 to 16, Jesus prays for his followers in chapter 17. How fascinating and wonderful, that Jesus has prayed for the first disciples and by implication for us.

Our scripture lesson for today is seven verses of that prayer. Jesus prays for unity among his followers, seemingly aware that those who call themselves Christians will be very good at division and arguments and bitterness.



This prayer for unity in John 17 is the foundation of the book *Peace Talks: The Good News of Jesus in a Donkey Elephant War*, by David Drum. Earlier this year we had a zoom adult education class with the author, and we have several copies of this very engaging book in the church library.

The reading from John 17 reflects a sense of mystical unity—between God the Father and Jesus the Son, between Jesus and his followers, and with the invitation of unity among Jesus’ followers.

Appropriately this section of the prayer closes with several reminders of love, the core value of our faith. Listen for God’s word.

### **John 17:20-26 (The Message)**

“I’m praying not only for them [the first disciples]  
But also for those who will believe in me  
Because of them and their witness about me.  
The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—  
Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you,  
So they might be one heart and mind with us.  
Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me.  
The same glory you gave me, I gave them,  
So they’ll be as unified and together as we are—  
I in them and you in me.  
Then they’ll be mature in this oneness,  
And give the godless world evidence  
That you’ve sent me and loved them  
In the same way you’ve loved me.

Father, I want those you gave me  
To be with me, right where I am,

So they can see my glory, the splendor you gave me,  
Having loved me  
Long before there ever was a world.  
Righteous Father, the world has never known you,  
But I have known you, and these disciples know  
That you sent me on this mission.  
I have made your very being known to them—  
Who you are and what you do—  
And continue to make it known,  
So that your love for me  
Might be in them  
Exactly as I am in them.

Thanks be to God for the words of Scripture.

“The Christian Century” is one of my favorite publications, and they have an occasional column called “How my mind has changed” in which theologians and writers and pastors reflect on ways that they have grown and changed their thinking on matters of faith, social issues, family, and more.

The series preface states:

*During times of turbulence in politics, culture, and religious life, it's tempting to hold tightly to current convictions. Allowing a change of one's mind or heart can be difficult work. With this in mind, we have resumed a Century series published at intervals since 1939, in which we ask leading thinkers to reflect on their own struggles, disappointments, and hopes as they address the topic, “How my mind has changed.”*

It's refreshing to see these great people recognizing that even they can keep learning and growing through life. The reality is that none of us have it figured out.

In our Christian vows for membership, baptism, and confirmation we have an implied question about changing our minds. We ask one another to turn from the ways of sin and evil, and turn to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Turn is another word for “repent” which means not only avoiding sin but also changing one's direction or changing one's mind.

A core principle of Christian life is changing direction, changing one's mind.

I imagine some of you are thinking about how your mind has changed, or how it might change in the future, while some of you are thinking about people you know who “really ought to change their mind.”

Both might be necessary and good—for you to change your mind, and for people you know to change their minds. But it’s pretty hard to change other people’s minds.

In our bitter and divisive times, we want to change everyone else’s mind, but unity isn’t just getting other people to think and act like us.

As Christians we need to start with ourselves.

Even if unity seems elusive or naïve in this divisive era, we can still work toward civility and be open to possibilities for small steps together.

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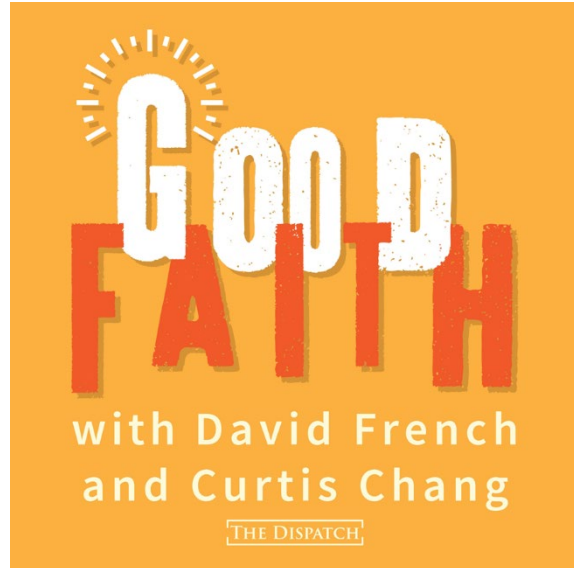
Over the last year I’ve become a fan of “Good Faith,” a weekly podcast by David French and Curtis Chang.

An episode in April called “The Partisan Mind vs. the Mind of Christ” encouraged listeners to avoid excessive partisanship, and to be open to changing our minds on things, with the implied goal of greater unity as the body of Christ.

I re-listened to the episode this week, reflecting on guns in our society.

The invitation for Jesus’ followers to take on the mind of Christ appears several places in the New Testament most famously in Philippians 2. My sense is that we are invited think and act like Jesus—with compassion, with hope, with justice, with love.

So the podcast hosts encourage listeners to shun a partisan identity and a partisan mind, and to really try to understand people with different views. One helpful goal is that we should be able to articulate those different views coherently and fairly—



so that people who hold them would agree, so they could say “Yes you understand me.”

Maybe next time you’re with someone who has a different view of guns, abortion, or whatever—maybe at your Memorial Day picnic tomorrow—instead of ignoring them or arguing with them, you sit down, and ask: “Can you help me understand your position?”

The podcast hosts also talk about the difference of being an advocate and being a learner with an issue, encouraging us to keep an open-minded posture. They encourage us to read and watch a variety of news sources and look for opinions on the other side, making sure they are the smart opinions, not the dumb ones.

I really feel like the Christian gospel calls us to be learners first and then advocates. We need to keep that openness to learning, growing, turning around, changing our minds, while also working for change.

Finally, they bring up the Westminster Larger Catechism—one of the documents in our *Book of Confessions*, our Presbyterian constitution.

Among other things, the Catechism reflects on the ten commandments. At the ninth commandment—which is “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”—as we might expect, the Catechism teaches us to speak the truth.

But it goes further than simply telling the truth. In the spirit of loving neighbors and loving enemies, the catechism says that the ninth commandment requires:

a charitable esteem of our neighbors, loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report concerning them;

The catechism from the 1600s, from a time when Protestants and Catholics despised each other, teaches that we need to give each other the benefit of the doubt and be generous in the ways we think about one another, which should help us if we really want to work toward the unity for which Jesus prays.

If we’re going to strive for the common good, we have to be patient with each other and really listen and care.

The need for unity or at least for some bridge building is as important now as ever.

Divisions have always been present—just look at the letters in the New Testament. There were plenty of conflicts in the early church. But in the past five or ten years, things have really accelerated, with a deepening political polarization across the country.

Fifty years ago, the biggest concern for most parents was that their young adult children were going to marry outside the faith. Catholics didn't want their kids marrying Protestants, and vice versa.

Now religion isn't the issue; politics is. Democrats don't want their kids marrying Republicans and vice versa.

A few years ago, at a high school graduation ceremony, a student speaker offered an inspiring quote, which he attributed to a recent president. Everyone clapped. But then the speaker told the audience the quote was from a different recent president of the other main political party. People stopped clapping, and a few people booed.

We've become very tribal. We don't even really listen to each other. We can do better.

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We were all horrified by the shooting in Uvalde, Texas this week, where 19 kids and two adults were killed by a young machine with an assault rifle. It's an absolutely devastating situation.

And we find ourselves again facing the same political battles about gun laws and regulations.

Somehow we collectively have failed to politically unify on steps toward fewer mass shootings. There is a pretty broad consensus on common sense gun reform that (depending on what polls you follow) with 70-90% of the population wanting: thorough background checks, no access to assault weapons, and red flag laws.

I continue to hope and pray that people of good will across the political spectrum will have the courage and humility and wisdom to recognize that we all have to find ways to work together for the common good.

Those of us who call ourselves Christians can help.

On this Memorial Day weekend, perhaps we can take inspiration from veterans, and do our best to fight the good fight. Persevere. Encourage each other. Work for the common good.

And as Christians I hope and pray that we can continually be open

to changing our minds, to really loving our neighbors, and to strive toward taking on the mind of Christ. Amen.