

“FAMILY VALUES (#3): COMMUNITY VALUES”

(Ephesians 4:1-6; Romans 12:3-8)

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**[PROP NEEDED: PPT Picture of Turtle on top of a fence post]**

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 3-18-07]

--I--

1. Read Text: Ephesians 4:1-6; Romans 12:3-8 Pray.
2. Many of us may remember when we were growing up (or perhaps when our children were growing up) that in Kindergarten one of the benchmarks of a child’s “Progress Report” has the phrase... “*Works and plays well with others.*” Do you remember that?

A–Well, while that phrase may accurately describe a goal for *Kindergartners*, it also could be said to reflect one of hallmarks of ANY mature *Christian*, as well.

B–For the last two weeks we’ve been sharing in a sermon series called “Family Values,” in which we’re using the 12 Core Values of *our* church here at East Cobb UMC as a *lens* through which to explore what it means to live as a Christian in today’s world by practicing the “Values” of the “Family of God.”

C–So far, we’ve talked about the six values that appear in today’s bulletin, three of which help relate us to *God*, and the next three of which relate us to *one another*.

3. But to be honest, I don’t believe it’s enough merely to talk about how we’re to relate to one another as *individuals*.

A–Instead, I believe we also need to know how we’re to work and minister *together* as a *community* of faith.

B–For that reason, today I want us to focus on three Core Values that deal primarily with how we as members of God’s family are to WORK TOGETHER – that is: corporately; in community with one another (hence today’s title “*Community Values*”).

–II–

4. Now, I believe the first of these – **UNITY** – is actually a description of WHAT community in God’s “family” should look like [Add Block #7 of “LGR” Cross & write in bulletin blank].

A–Today’s passage from Ephesians says that we’re to “*maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Verse 3), and it reminds us that there is “*one body and one Spirit,... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [and] one God and Father of all...*” (Verses 4-5).

1–Now, let me hasten to clarify that despite the many references to “oneness” and “unity” that appears, “unity” in the Bible *never* means “uniformity.”

2–It doesn't mean we have to all think alike, or believe alike, or dress alike, or even worship alike.

B–Instead, the phrase “*unity of the Spirit*” that's used here has more to do with having a oneness of Mission, Vision, and Values (that's the “*one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, etc.*” language from Verses 4-5) that may get *lived out* in slightly different ways, by different people, in different contexts.

1–For example, some of us honor God each week by dressing up in nice clothes, worshipping God in a more formal environment, and with a more formal liturgy that emphasizes the majesty and awesomeness of our God.

2–Others of us honor the Lord each week with more casual dress, in an ordinary looking space, through a more relaxed style of worship that emphasizes both our gift of *authenticity TO* God, and His gift of *intimacy WITH* us.

3–But notice that while the *methods* differ, *both* of these approaches are still merely ways to accomplish the COMMON mission of honoring and worshipping God. <sup>1</sup>

C–So let me invite everyone here to ask yourself this question: “*Does MY definition of ‘unity’ mean that everyone in my church, my work, or in my family have to do things exactly like I want or think? OR... Can I recognize that ‘unity’ can (and should) include a diversity of ways to accomplish the things that are important to me?*”

1–Friends, like most of you, I want East Cobb UMC to continue to become a more “unified” church.

2–But I for one hope that our “unity” *never* becomes “uniformity,” with just one “correct” way of doing certain things,...

3–...Because God's plan and purpose for us is the biblical paradox which says that “unity” in His family actually describes a *diverse* “living out” of a common Mission, Vision, and set of Values.

5. Now, if this first “Community Value” (*Unity*) reminds us of WHAT “community” in the family of God should look like, then the next two can be seen as ways to actually accomplish it. The first of these is **TEAMWORK**. [Add Block #8 of “LGR” Cross & write in bulletin blank]

A–Practically all of the Romans 12 passage speaks of Christian life and work in terms of being a “*body*” – that we're all a part of something larger than ourselves, each with unique, differing “*gifts*” and “*functions*,”...

B–...and that rather than trying to go it alone (As Vs.3 puts it, “*thinking of [our] selves more highly than [we] ought...*”), we should instead USE these differences *together* to accomplish our common tasks.

C—I want us all take a good look the picture on the screen [Show picture of turtle on top of a fence post]. What do you notice that’s odd about this? [Ask for responses...]

1—One thing is clear: Whenever we see a turtle on top of a fence post, we know at least one thing – he had *help* getting there.

2—You know, you and I live in a world which stresses “*independence*”; “*pull yourself up by your bootstraps*”; “*don’t rely on anyone else, or it’s a sign of weakness*”; “*to go it alone is a sign of strength and character.*”

3—And it all sounds so good, but you know, it doesn’t really work, because most of what we end up accomplishing in life is actually the result of others helping us along the way in some capacity or another.

4—Remember that the very first thing Jesus when he set out to save the world was to call together a *team* of “not-so-like-minded” individuals who nevertheless were united in their love for Jesus, and their intent to follow him. <sup>2</sup>

5—So, the biblical solution is not for us to do what I call “Lone Ranger” ministry, but instead for us to do our work and ministry *together* in and through *teams*. <sup>3</sup>

D—So let me ask:

1—If you lead any kind of group or class or organization here at church, or in your business, do you do all the work, trying to be a “lone-ranger”? Or do you invite/involve others in helping you?

2—If you’re a parent or some of leader in your family, do you arbitrarily pass down decisions “from on high”? Or do you involve your family members in decisions that affect them?

3—You see, in the family of God, we’re invited to live and work through “teamwork.”

6. But if having “Unity” in God’s family requires the practice of “Teamwork,” I’ve found that “Teamwork” also requires the practice a 3<sup>rd</sup> “Community Value” that’s actually implied throughout *both* of today’s scriptures: **TRUST** <sup>4</sup> [Add Block #9 & write in bulletin].

A—You know, our natural instinct as human beings is to trust only *ourselves* and our *own* abilities to accomplish things.

1—So, if we’re the leader or head of a class, or a committee, or a department in our business, or our family, too often it’s just easier to do things *ourselves* than to risk trusting someone *else* to goof it up! (You know what I mean!)

2—Another example of this financial stewardship: we’re not sure we really *trust* our church leaders or the direction they’re taking us, so we just act independent and withhold our money as silent protest – never mind that it belongs to *God*, rather than to us or the church!

B—[STORY OF BRIDGE CROSSINGS]

Several years ago at our North Georgia Methodist Annual Conference, Pastor Dee Shelnutt told the story about how, when he was a boy growing up in in Gainesville, GA, he and his family often had to cross bridges across Lake Lanier.

He said that he didn't mind crossing the bridges when his mom or dad were driving, but one day when his older sister (who'd had 4 wrecks in the 4 months she'd learned to drive) started to drive across one of the bridges, he remembered kicking and screaming that he wasn't going to go across in a car driven by her.

And he told the Conference that his father said to him, “*Dee, you have to go across because you're part of the family.*”

C—Friends, being part of the “family of God” means that there are times when we just need to trust those who’re “driving” (i.e., leading) to take us safely across the various “bridges” of life because we’re all part of the same “family.”

D—So I ask: What’s YOUR trust level... with your fellow church members? ...with your church leaders? ...with yourself? ...with your spouse? ...with your kids?

–III–

7. My point is that the degree to which we’re willing to step out and risk *trusting* each other is the degree to which we’ll be able to work as a *team*.

A—And the degree to which we work as a *team* will determine just how *unified* “in the Spirit” we truly are.

B—So my prayer is that as we invite God’s Holy Spirit to not only help us understand but also to practice these three “Community Values” of *Unity*, *Teamwork*, and *Trust*, we’ll discover the blessings of God himself.

8. [PRAYER]

9. [HYMN: The Faith We Sing #2223, “They’ll Know We Are Christians”]

**ENDNOTES:**

1. We sometimes refer to this as having “*unity in diversity*.” Consider the fact that we here at East Cobb UMC have one common **Mission** (“*Sharing the Love and Light of Jesus with a Changing World*”), one common **Vision** (“*reaching our local and global community with the gospel of Jesus Christ*”), and one common set of **Core Values** (the 12 Values we’re unpacking in this sermon series) However, through our different worship styles, groups, etc. we *live out* these common things in slightly *different* ways.

2. Jesus' "team" was made up of many different types of people, with many different backgrounds and beliefs. But because they were unified around the common mission, vision, and values of Jesus, this band of 12 was ultimately able to work as a team and change the world forever.

3. Perhaps you've heard some "teamwork" quotes before, but let me share just a few:

–T.E.A.M. means "*Together Everyone Achieves More*" (Author Unknown).

–"*Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success*" (Author Unknown).

–"*None of us is as smart as all of us*" (Leadership consultant Ken Blanchard).

–"*No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it*" (H.E. Luccock).

4. In fact, in my experience, it's the *lack* of this value of "Trust" that very often keeps us from working in "teams" – because we don't really trust one another.