Called from the Chaos into Unity

"Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.” –Philippians 2:2 (read x2)

1. **Biblical Struggles–**Why did Paul write this?
   1. We are reading ancient mail, written from Paul to the early church of Philippi
      1. This letter is more than a friendly greeting, but was rather written for a particular purpose
      2. Its purpose is to guide, encourage, and unify people who were going through hardship
   2. So what type of hardship were they facing?
      1. Opposition and Persecution: The church in Philippi faced opposition and persecution from several different groups. The city of Philippi was a Roman colony, and thus it would have been subject to Roman authority and laws that commonly clashed with Christian beliefs and practices. Additionally, the spread of Christianity challenged the Greco-Roman religious and social norms of the time, which could have led to hostility and persecution from both Jewish and Gentile populations.
      2. External Influences and False Teaching: The city of Philippi was heavily influenced by Hellenistic culture and religious practices. The presence of various pagan religions and philosophies may have posed a challenge to the believers, potentially leading to temptation of incorporating pagan elements into their Christian faith. Paul warns against many false teachers and teachings which had already begun to emerge. The apostle urged the church to discern and hold fast to the truth of the Gospel.
      3. Internal Conflict and Discord: Like any human community, the church in Philippi would have had its share of interpersonal conflicts, disagreements, and differing perspectives. Paul addresses the issue of unity and encourages harmony among the believers in his letter, suggesting that maintaining unity may have been a challenge for the church.
      4. Financial Struggles: The Philippian believers were known for their generous support of Paul's ministry (Philippians 4:15-18). However, they also experienced periods of financial hardship, as Paul mentions their past and present financial contributions. These financial difficulties may have affected the church's ability to support one another and engage in charitable works.
         1. As we think about each of these historical struggles and challenges, we can quickly see why Paul’s words are important for us today.
2. **Modern Struggles–** what challenges does the church face today?
   1. We must recognize that we face many of the same challenges in our new modern context. While we are some 2,000 odd years removed from Paul’s writing, similar struggles remain. As a church we face:
      1. Secularism and Pluralism: There has been statistical observation in the rise of secularism. The increasing diversity of religious beliefs present challenges to our modern Church's influence and engagement with society. This cultural shift towards secular values and the prevalence of pluralistic worldviews can make it more difficult for the Church to effectively communicate its message and engage with a changing society.
      2. Declining Church Attendance and Engagement: Many churches in America are experiencing declining attendance and engagement, particularly among younger generations. Factors contributing to this trend include cultural shifts, changing attitudes towards organized religion, busier lifestyles, and a perceived lack of relevance or authenticity in church communities.
      3. Internal Unity and Divisions: The Church is still not immune to internal divisions and conflicts. Differences in theology, worship styles, social issues, and interpretations of Scripture can create divisions within and between denominations, hindering the Church's collective impact and witness. Nurturing unity amidst diversity and finding common ground on essential matters is an ongoing challenge.
      4. Generational Transitions and Stewardship: Many churches face financial challenges and difficulties in navigating generational transitions. Balancing financial stewardship, resource allocation, and adapting to changing demographics and generational preferences are ongoing challenges for church leadership.
   2. If Paul’s purpose is to guide, encourage, and unify people who are going through hardship, we need his words now more than ever.
      1. It’s in this place of discouragement, of overwhelming circumstances, that we again receive the words "Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”
      2. It is easy to feel overwhelmed, or like the odds are impossible, but I imagine the Philippians felt similarly at times and God met them in their struggle
      3. This is more than ancient mail, it is the living word of God, speaking through Paul as a vessel, offering us wisdom on how to navigate forward together.
3. **Moving forward–** So we know the challenges we face are daunting, but they also aren’t anything new… so what can we do?
   1. There’s good news, we have not only received encouragement, but also instruction! Breaking down Philippians 2:2

1. "Being like-minded" → Unity of purpose and mindset

2. "Having the same love" → *Agape* love as the foundation

3. "Being one in spirit" → Shared spiritual connection and harmony

4. "Of one mind" → United in vision and mission

* 1. Applying unity to our lives today– What do these Biblical concepts look like in a practical way?
     1. Creating Something new– we are charged on a local level to care for our communities and be unified in mission as a church. If we are to be of like-mind, fostering a culture of love, unified in both spirit & mind, then we need to be asking ourselves a few important questions:
        1. What are the needs of our community? We each live in and serve a unique context. What local needs might our church be able to help fulfill?
        2. How can we grow, build, and develop diverse relationships and partnerships? What would it look like to extend and unify the body of Christ in a tangible way?
        3. What are the items that we hold as important as a body of believers? How is God getting ahold of our hearts and minds? We are urged to be unified on mission as a church.
     2. Joining in– Fortunately we don’t have to reinvent the proverbial mission wheel. There’s already a lot of really good stuff happening in the life of the BGAV and WMUV that we can support through the Alma hunt offering. When we give to these ministry partners, we are financially buying in and supporting efforts such as:
        1. Crossroads→ Our tithes are helping sustain the ministry of CrossRoads Camp and Conference Center, helping young adults discern their callings to the pulpit and missions field, and helping hundreds of campers connect with Jesus, many for the first time.
        2. Church Planting→ supporting people like Emanuel Mustapha and his church planting team who work tirelessly to spread the Good News in Northeastern Ghana and surrounding countries. They have helped plant 500 churches since they began in 2014. Now the goal is to have planted 2,000 churches by 2029.
        3. “Serving Together”→ serving our neighbors who experience poverty throughout the Eastern Shore of VA. “Serving Together” is a new movement to bring people together to address those challenges by developing connection points—strengthening relationships and unifying various resources in ways that individuals cannot do alone.
           1. Through our church’s generous tithes and offerings, we are following the Great Commission laid out in Acts 1:8 , we are going from Jerusalem (our backyards) to Judea and Samaria (our state and nation) to the ends of the earth (global missions) – we are doing it with our other Christian brothers and sisters, we are becoming one unified church on mission together.

Summary: In the end, then, we are being called out of chaos and into unity. The problems we face are no comparison for the work of the Holy Spirit which draws us together in mind, love, and spirit. Therefore the time is now, may Paul’s words encourage and strengthen us. May we be bold in our unity, and together on mission. Amen.