

# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

July 19, 2015

*“One Is The Holiest Number”*



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister  
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister  
Eleanor Sorenson: Lay Reader

## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

*26701 McCall Boulevard,  
Menifee, California 92586  
(951) 679-1149*

*Email: [uccmenifee@gmail.com](mailto:uccmenifee@gmail.com)*

*Website: [menifeeucc.org](http://menifeeucc.org)*

***Live Life Fully Alive!***

July 19, 2015  
“One Is The Holiest Number”  
Rev. Bill Freeman

**Jeremiah 23:1-4**

*Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.*

**Ephesians 2:14-22**

*For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.*

“One Is The Holiest Number”

“Modern Family” as you may know, is a situation comedy on ABC about three different families, all related to each other. One of the characters on the show, Gloria, is from Columbia. One time she called an unpleasant situation that another family

member was experiencing a, “HaHa moment.” She explained that a “HaHa moment” is when something seemingly bad happens that years later you look back on and laugh. A HaHa moment.

An “Aha moment” is an epiphany. Now “Epiphany” has a couple different meanings. “Epiphany” in the Christian calendar is a Christian festival honoring the arrival of the three wise men, the three kings, coming to see the baby Jesus. “An epiphany” is a moment of insight where you see something in a new way, a way you never saw it before. It’s not a “HaHa moment.” It’s an “Aha” moment.

I had an epiphany a couple years ago. I’d been called to be the minister at a Unitarian Universalist congregation. Unitarians, as the name implies, don’t believe in the Holy Trinity: God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. They’re not Trinitarians, they’re Unitarians. They may believe in God, but they don’t really believe in Jesus and the Holy Spirit. I was at that church for three years. During that time, I had an epiphany, an Aha moment. I saw, deep in my soul, that I was not a Unitarian (not that there’s anything wrong with that), I was a Trinitarian. In that moment, my belief in the Holy Trinity - God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit - was strengthened and solidified. So I made a concerted effort to try to become the minister at a Christian church. And not too much later you all called me to be your minister at this Christian church. And for that I thank God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever had an epiphany, an Aha moment, a moment of insight where you saw something in a new way, in a way you never saw it before? Have you ever wanted to exclaim in that moment, “Aha!”? I wonder if today’s scripture passages will be an epiphany, an Aha moment, for you, as they were for me.

A seminary professor told us on the first day of class that Jesus didn’t come to earth to start a new religion - Christianity - he came to earth to reform Judaism. That’s why Jesus chastised the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the Religious Right of his day, for following the letter of the law, but not its spirit. That’s why Jesus overturned the moneychangers’ tables in the temple, because what they were doing was turning God’s house of prayer

into a den of thieves. And that's why Jesus was always saying things like: You have heard that it was said...but I say to you. In other words: it is written in the Hebrew Scriptures...but I'm going to change that, because I have come to proclaim a more loving message from God.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians makes some surprising theological claims about Jesus. Paul is saying that Jesus abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances. So Paul is saying that Jesus did come to earth to reform Judaism. But Paul is also saying that Jesus came to earth to form a new religion, but not Christianity. Paul is saying that Jesus came to earth to bring together Jews and Gentiles, all the people of the planet. And Paul is saying that by bringing together Jews and Gentiles, Jesus was essentially trying to create one new religion, "one new humanity."

I'm sure I've read Paul's letter to the Ephesians before. But I must not have been paying attention to what Paul was saying. Otherwise I would have had an epiphany back then. Jesus came to earth to form a new religion, but not Christianity? Jesus came to earth to bring together Jews and Gentiles, all the people of the planet? And by bringing together Jews and Gentiles, Jesus was essentially trying to create one new religion, "one new humanity"? If I had been paying attention before when I read this, I would have said in that moment: "Aha!"

Was Paul's letter to the Ephesians an epiphany for you? Did you say to yourself: Jesus came to earth to form a new religion, but not Christianity? Did you say to yourself: Jesus came to earth to bring together Jews and Gentiles, all the people of the planet? Did you say to yourself: And by bringing together Jews and Gentiles, Jesus was essentially trying to create one new religion, "one new humanity"? Did you say to yourself in that moment, "Aha!"?

The Christian New Testament abounds with examples of how we are all "one new humanity." The Christian New Testament says, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." The Christian New Testament also says, "there is

no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" These passages from Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Colossians seem to be saying, like Paul's letter to the Ephesians, that we are all one new humanity.

The Hebrew Scriptures abound with examples of how we are all "one new humanity." The Hebrew Scriptures say we all descended from Adam and Eve, so we are all related, so we are all one new humanity. The Hebrew Scriptures say we all descended from Noah and his family after the Great Flood, so we are all related, so we are all one new humanity. And the Hebrew Scriptures say we all descended from Abraham, so we are all related, so we are all one new humanity. And today, Paul would apparently say that all of Abraham's descendants, all of us, all the people on the planet, are one new humanity.

The prophet Jeremiah says the Lord decries, "the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" Since we are all the sheep of God's pasture, all the Jews and all the Gentiles, the Lord seems to be decrying separating us. The Lord seems to want us all to come together as one new humanity.

Jesus, in the Christian New Testament, is called the Good Shepherd. And the Good Shepherd cares for his sheep, and doesn't want any of them to be separated. So who better to bring together all the scattered sheep of God's pasture - all the Christians and all the Jews, all the Buddhists and all the Hindus, all the Muslims and all the Atheists - who better to bring them all together than the Good Shepherd, Jesus? And remember, Jesus also said, "In God's house there are many mansions." And Jesus seems to be saying that when we all get together in the many mansions of God's house, in the here and now or in the hereafter, we will all be, as the Apostle Paul says, one new humanity.

What if what Jesus and Paul and the Prophets are saying is true? If what they are saying is true, if it's a universal truth, then we would expect to find that sentiment, that breaking down of religious boundaries, coming from people of other faiths. And we do.

Gandhi, a devout Hindu, says, “Let us work together for unity and love.” If we did that, if we all did that, if we all worked together for unity and love, then we would all come together as one new humanity.

The Dalai Lama, a devout Buddhist, supports promoting, “harmony between humanity, and particularly harmony between the various religions.” Granted that harmony between the various religions hasn’t come about in thousands of years, but who’s to say that some day in the future that harmony between religions won’t come about? (Hopefully it will come about more quickly than thousands of years from now.)

And Khalil Gibran, the poet, a Lebanese Christian, who was influenced by Sufism, says, “I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons [and daughters] of one religion, and it is the spirit.” What Khalil Gibran seems to be saying is that people of all faiths need to eliminate religious rivalries and become one in the spirit, become one new humanity.

Harry Nilsson wrote a song years ago that Three Dog Night made famous. The song is entitled, “One.” Three Dog Night sings, “One is the loneliest number that you’ll ever do.” Paul seems to be suggesting that when it comes to bringing together all the religions and all the people of the world into “one new humanity,” one is not the loneliest number; one is the holiest number.

It’s like the hymn, “Let There Be Peace On Earth,” where it says, “With God our Creator, children all are we, let us walk with each other, in perfect harmony.” According to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, that’s what Jesus came to earth to teach us to do: Walk with each other, in perfect harmony. So why don’t we do that? Why are there wars and rumors of wars all around the world? And especially: Why are there religious wars, wars in the name of God, all around the world, if we’re all supposed to be “one new humanity”? I don’t know. Perhaps people’s egos get in the way of all of us coming together. Perhaps people’s greed gets in the way of all of us coming together. And perhaps people’s hatred gets in the way of all of us coming together.

All I know is Jesus gave us a new commandment, that we love one another. So maybe what you and I can do, as a start, is to love one another. I know it's difficult, because we have to love everyone, and forgive everyone, including our enemies. But if we can do that then maybe one day all Christian churches - Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant - can love one another, can join together, can become one again. And then maybe by loving one another, joining together, and becoming one again, all Christian churches could demonstrate to all the religions and all the people of the planet how to love one another, join together, and become one. I know that's a lot to ask. Or to dream about. But if that happened, it would be one heck of an Aha moment. So let us hope - and pray - that one day we will all love one another, that one day we will all join together, and that one day we will all become "one new humanity."

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to love one another.  
Help us to help others to love one another.  
And help us to become "one new humanity."  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*  
Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*  
Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*  
Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*  
Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*  
Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*  
Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*  
Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*  
Humanism