



The Church is the Church only when it exists for others (Bonhoeffer)  
The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ (C. S. Lewis)

June 9 **The New Shofar** Mark 3:20-35

**If a kingdom is divided against itself,  
that kingdom cannot stand.**

On June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1858, **Abraham Lincoln** gave his famous “House Divided” speech in which he offered the following warning to the nation. *A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.* It was a significant speech by Lincoln that served to bring to the fore the weaknesses bubbling away in a nation that professed to be one and free. Towards the end of the bloody Civil War, he further urged the people to have *malice towards none and charity to all*. It was the pathway to a genuine unity and enduring Peace.

**Any house divided against itself, will not stand**

For the followers of Jesus Christ unity grows out of His mission and ministry, the mission of Jesus who prayed to His Father...*the glory which you gave to me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. (John 17:22).*

This is the *great Christian gift to the world, an invitation to be one, to be co-sharers with other believers in the life of the Trinity. One with God and one with others.* God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are unified within the Trinity, as is everyone with whom they have communion. Satan is the one, the only one causing disunity and conflict.

***Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, seeking someone to devour – 1 Peter 5:8***

We can acknowledge that Satan causes conflict, division and disunity, so why do we not recognize the devil’s presence when we see these signs of his activity? Why do we find it so difficult to see

his hands at work within us, or in the people around us when divisions arise from our words and deeds? Acknowledging this is an essential first step to renewal and rebuilding. Our parishes would be more welcoming and inclusive, and communities would not live with so much discord. Without discord we would have an opportunity to re-engage the world with the Good News of God’s reign. Satan knows this. Why do we think he works so hard opposing it?

One sad aspect of our Church today is the way we so often fail to present a living witness to the Risen Christ through the way we live together as His Body in the world. This does not mean we all think the same and say the same things. It means that in our diversity we have a unity Christ alone can establish, a unity the world can recognise, the kind of unity for which they yearn.

Jesus explained how Satan’s kingdom will fall if it is divided against itself. The same principle applies to the Church (local as well as universal). Not that Satan can bring the Church and its mission to an End. Jesus said the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church, but that does not mean we will not suffer great losses, an ongoing alienation from the world and leave untold millions of souls struggling to find their own way to life eternal. That is not why we exist. Why Jesus calls us. The Church has a mission.

We are called to be faithful and deliberate in living the traditions of the Apostles. In doing that, we ensure the devil cannot even get a foothold in our communities because there is strength in numbers and strength in unity. Individually, one at a time, we can be broken. Satan knows this and exploits it. One single branch can be broken with ease. Put six of those branches together in a stack and it is impossible to break. This is the devil’s tactic. Separate the Body of Christ into individual parts

and then he is free to plunder at will. This is the warning from Jesus today.

***The devil is not fighting religion. He is producing a counterfeit Christianity, so much like the real one that good Christians are afraid to speak out against it.***

Our faith communities and individual believers, at some point at least, set out on a life of passionate faith and Gospel living. However, it is when we entertain the devil's temptations and begin to think mostly about ourselves and what we want, rejecting *even one of the least of these children of mine*, that the Wicked one has gained a foothold in our lives. All the good we ever did will not matter in the end, if we do not persevere in following God's commandments.

We need to be vigilant like the fully armed man in the gospel who guarded his palace ((i.e. *doers* of the Gospel). Then we will be safe from the devil's assaults.

However, it is not enough to just do the minimum, to stay out of trouble, or avoid sin. By *obeying* God's commandments; by *doing* God's will through *imitating* Christ; by *living out* Christ's teachings, we will live forever in heaven. The Holy Spirit is already with us, defending us, protecting us and working as our Advocate. However, saying one thing but *doing* another is the perfect recipe for disaster.

***For where God built a church, there the devil would also build a chapel (Luther)***

To reach unity in the body of Christ, we must build our spiritual lives on the person of Jesus Christ. We have the task to grow into maturity with Christ as our leader and Lord. We stay loyal to his teaching and follow his example in life. We choose steadfastness and faithfulness, joy, and hope.

Jesus came to earth to make a way for us to know the Father's heart. His complete purpose means that one day he will come again in power and glory. He will separate the wicked from the righteous. He will fulfill the wedding banquet promise (**Matthew 22:1-2** and **Luke 22:29-30**).

Jesus will resurrect the dead, institute the final judgment, and bring in the age to come. This event between Jesus and the Pharisees results in Jesus making a call to action. A house divided against itself will not stand, and he who is not with Jesus is against him. He who does not gather with him scatters. Jesus, filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit, sets humankind free to live for him, love him, and stand in unity with him.

**Satan hates Christian fellowship** *Charles Spurgeon*

Unity cannot be achieved by human powers and capacities, by human reasoning or desire. The first step in Christian unity is public and private prayer for God's assistance, opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit, joining ourselves to Christ's intentions and interceding for each other, that we may grow in ardent fidelity to God's will.

The second step is conversion, a true change of heart. This involves repentance and reparation for sins against unity, sins such as long-standing misgivings inherited from the past, mutual misunderstandings, prejudices, complacency, insufficient knowledge of the other, refusals to forgive and pride. Conversion from a biblical perspective involves us striving to grow in love, self-denial, humility, patience and an ongoing renewal of our life with God and with (all) others. This is why a broken faith community is so hard to bring together. It involves an openness to a whole-of-life transformation in Christ, an acceptance that we are sinners before we point out the sins of others and a willingness to allow the Spirit to lead us along pathways that may be alien to us.

This unity is not a wish for Christians. Indeed, we cannot be Christian and divided, broken off into parts and alienated one from another. It was the dying wish of Jesus, expressed in his Priestly Prayer at the Last Supper, that all Christians share together in the oneness of the Holy Trinity. The Church has always taught that she has been called by God to be a sacrament, a sign providing a living witness to the communion of the Holy Trinity into which all men and women are invited to live.

Mark's Jesus is clear: unity is from God. Disunity is the work of Satan.