

Theme: Being a Community, Reaching the Community

Title: “Things That Go Better with Unity” – Acts 4:23-37

Aim: Recognize that everything in the Church goes better w/unity.

Intro: Back in 1955, or thereabouts, Roy Orbison wrote & recorded a song entitled “Things Go Better w/Coke.” A few of you will remember that, if you followed rock & roll in its early days. I’m pretty sure by the lyrics that Orbison was referring to the actual soft drink, Coca Cola, but who could be sure that there wasn’t some hidden meaning? Maybe that’s why it took Coca Cola 8 years to adopt part of the song as its theme (or maybe it took them that long to work out the legal/financial matters involved. “Things go better w/Coca Cola, things go better w/Coke.” I’m sure our own Brad Ellis would agree, being the Coca Cola aficionado that he is! I’d like to borrow (w/out checking the legal or financial matters involved) & amend that slogan. I submit to you that, in regard to the Church, things always go better w/unity. Theme: Being a community, reaching the community. We’ve asserted that a true community of faith should value most what God values most, such as His glory, & unity w/in His Church – oneness of His children w/Him & w/each other. Jesus prayed for unity in His “High Priestly” prayer (John 17). Paul urged us to “be eager (work hard) to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph.4:3), & he listed 7 factors which are the substance of that unity, true of every true believer everywhere & all true believers together. “There is one body & one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God & Father of all...” (Eph.4:4-6). It indeed seems evident from Scripture that in regard to the Church – big C (Church worldwide) & little c (local fellowships), everything goes better w/unity. I will be doing things a little differently today & considering a number of Scripture verses/passages that are the basis of that statement, but will begin w/& read now one passage which seems to point to several things that go better w/unity: Acts 4:23-37 [READ]. The apostles Peter & John had been arrested after a lame beggar was healed in Jesus’ name & Peter took the opportunity to preach about Jesus. This riled the religious leaders, specifically the Sadducees, who were “greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people & proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” They questioned

them & threatened them to not “speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus,” to which Peter replied, “we’ve got to listen to/obey God & can’t help but speak about what we have seen & heard.” Upon release, they went back & reported to their friends what had happened, & they “lifted their voices together to God.” That is the 1<sup>st</sup> thing on my list regarding what goes better w/unity. I) **Prayer goes better w/unity**. They asked God to give them boldness to proclaim the gospel in the face of opposition. And, their prayer was powerfully answered! Vs31 - “The place in which they were gathered together was shaken, & they were all filled w/the Holy Spirit & continued to speak the word of God w/boldness.” Vs33 – “And w/great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, & great grace was upon them all.” Acts 5:42 – “And every day, in the temple & from house to house, they did not cease teaching & preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” Obviously we can & should pray individually, & do so effectively, but there is something very special & powerful about praying together as believers who are united in Christ. Last Sunday a good number of us gathered together after worship to pray for various needs, anointing some w/oil & laying on hands. I sensed it & several remarked to me that it was a very Spirit led time of prayer, & we wait for God’s answers. Prayer goes better w/unity & unity is enhanced by the prayers of God’s people together. Piggy-backing w/that is the truth that II) **Witness goes better w/unity**. Again, they were bold together. They individually preached the gospel, but they did so knowing that their bros/sis were doing the same. In Acts 1:8 it was to His gathered disciples that Jesus said “You (plural) will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, & you will be My witnesses...” I’ve read (don’t remember where) that it takes somewhere around 5-7 witnessing contacts to win someone to Christ. We have to work on it together. As practically the whole town of Sychar came to see & hear Jesus after the woman he encountered at the well told them about Him. As they were coming, Jesus told His disciples to “lift up” their eyes & see that the fields are ripe for harvest. In John 4:36 He said, “Already the one who reaps is receiving wages & gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower & reaper may rejoice together.” III) **Community goes better w/unity**. Look at

vss32 & 34. As the believers gathered, they were “of one heart & soul,” & they didn’t cling to anything they had, but gladly shared w/each other. They cared for one another so that, “There was not a needy person among them...” Barnabas was a great example of that, but they were all helping each other. God’s not necessarily asking each of us to sell all we have & give to those in need around us, but He is asking us to care for each other & help one another in need, which takes love for our Lord & love for each other, & hearts knit together in Christ. But it’s also true that caring for one another binds us together, strengthening our unity. Now let’s look at some other Scripture passages. Without a doubt, IV) **Worship goes better w/unity**. In Psalm 34:3 David calls upon all who hear, “Oh, magnify the Lord w/me, & let us exalt His name together.” Psalm 95:1-2, 6 – “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into His presence w/thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him w/songs of praise!” “Oh come, let us worship & bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!” Certainly we can & should worship God individually, but how much better to worship together in unity! We encourage & embolden each other’s worship when we worship together. It was when the leaders of the church in Antioch were worshipping together that the Holy Spirit directed them to “set apart for Me Barnabas & Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:1). The Holy Spirit works among His united, gathered, worshipping Church. That’s why God admonishes us thru the author of Hebrews (10:24-25) “to consider how to stir up one another to love & good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another, & all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” V) **Work goes better w/unity**. In Nehemiah 4:6 we’re told that those who returned from exile to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem did so together. “So we build the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.” I would add, they had a mind to work together. If you read Nehemiah 3, you’ll see that individual families repaired & rebuilt the gates & wall opposite their house, & the wall was built as they worked together. In II Corinthians 6:1, Paul wrote about “working together” w/God, meaning that he & his co-laborers in the ministry of the gospel were also co-laborers w/God.

We're called by Paul to be "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord & of one mind" (Phil.2:2). When together we love our Lord & His church, when we are united w/one purpose – to know Him & make Him known – how much work we can get done for Him together! It's said that "many hands make light work" & it's true. When we work together for the cause of Christ, each one using his/her spiritual gifts, much can be accomplished for Him. VI) **Growth goes better w/unity**. This was touched on in last week's message from Ephesians 4. As spiritual leaders in the church lead & equip, & each part (each one) is working properly, the body grows "so that it builds itself up in love" (Eph.4:16). We must endeavor to grow in Christ no matter how others are growing or not, but how much better we'll grow if we are each growing together, helping one another grow. We ought to lovingly speak into each other's lives, encouraging, exhorting, even correcting, so that we will grow – together. It's not just about me or you, but about us. Certainly, VII) **Fellowship goes better w/unity**. Look again in the book of Acts for the wonderful example of the early Church – Acts 2:42, 46-47 – "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching & the fellowship, to the breaking of bread & the prayers." "And day by day, attending the temple together & breaking bread in their homes, they received their food w/glad & generous hearts, praising God & having favor w/all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." They devoted themselves to fellowship & hosted one another in their homes & worked together in the community. They were one & their fellowship (koinonia – joint participation, a sharing in, intimacy – more than just being together, but knit together), their fellowship was rich. Now, you may think of other things that go better w/unity, & I encourage you to think about it & talk about it & most of all practice it. One final thought that I have is that VIII) **Eternity will certain go better w/unity**. Paul wrote this glorious promise of God in I Thessalonians 4:16-17 – "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven w/a cry of command, w/the voice of an archangel, & w/the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together w/them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, & so we

will always be w/the Lord.” Our unity, like everything else, will be perfect in eternity, because there will be no hindrances to it. The perfect oneness of the Trinity will be mirrored by the oneness of every believer w/God & w/each other. It really is hard to imagine what it will be like, but it’s fun to try. Unity is vitally important. If we’re going to be the community of faith God calls us to be, then we must recognize & embrace the unity of the Spirit & work hard to maintain it. The world & the community around us needs to see the Church, this church united.