



*Leann Williams*

Leann Williams and her husband, Bruce, live in Hayden, Idaho. They are members of Spokane Friends Church and are currently developing a new meeting for worship in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, called Friends in Common. Leann recently took on a new career as a massage therapist after many years of teaching. She refers to herself as a massage/pastor because a lot of soul-care takes place in the context of massage.

*BIBLE READING: John 17:20-23*

In the past year or so I have been deeply troubled by the apparent inability to find a true unity in the faith communities of which I am a part. To me Scripture is clear that unity is to be one of the distinguishing characteristics of followers of Christ. I see the yearnings for unity among God's people throughout Scripture. David expresses this desire in Psalm 133 where he states, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!...For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."

The Old Testament prophets carried a vision of expanding the community of followers of God to include foreigners, "others," uniting nations under God as in Isaiah 56:6-8. Jesus spoke of "other sheep" being included in God's flock in John 10. The theme of a gathering of diverse people who unite in worship continues to the book of Revelation where it is expressed in Chapter 5 that Christ will draw persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation to form a kingdom of priests to serve God.

Unity among God's people is not just for our own pleasure. Unity bears witness to the validity of our faith. Jesus prayed for our unity in John 17:20-23 so that the world would believe that Jesus was sent from God.

In the week to follow we will look further into Scripture to find guidance and wisdom on how to pursue unity as God's people. For today, let's pray with Jesus that God would bring our faith communities to unity as we experience being one with Christ in God.

*SONG: They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for unity in your home, church, and the larger body of Christ.*

—Leann Williams

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 1:20-30*

In the past two years I have transitioned out of twenty-four years of teaching into my new career as a massage therapist. It's not surprising to me that the approaches to body work are as varied as approaches to teaching. In the body of Christ, however, we are called to be perfectly united in mind and thought, an idea that seems almost impossible at first.

1 Corinthians 1:10 states, "I appeal to you... that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."

The phrase "agree with one another in what you say" comes from two Greek words, *lego* and *autos*. *Lego*, here translated "say," contains the concepts of affirming, intention, meaning, or speaking out of. So, to me, this passage is not calling us to agreement in what we think on specific issues, but has more to do with our frame of reference. We need to speak out of a common frame of reference. But what paradigm can unite our sense of meaning or intention?

In today's reading, we find human wisdom and strength contrasted to the power and wisdom of God. It states that Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God. The common frame of reference we need to cultivate is found in the wisdom of God lived out in Jesus Christ. On our own we fail utterly in finding the wisdom needed to develop a community that can reflect a vision of God to the world through our unity. We need the wisdom of God in Christ to find true unity.

*SONG: In Christ There Is No East or West*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for God's wisdom in a specific situation today.*

—Leann Williams

*BIBLE READING: James 3:13-18*

As a massage therapist I am aware of how interconnected the various parts of the body are. Injury and pain in one part can produce a chain reaction that carries problems to seemingly unrelated areas. Holistic medicine attempts to bring health and integrity to the body, mind, and spirit. The body of Christ is only healthy when there is true integrity and interconnectedness as well. I would call that condition “unity” which requires God’s wisdom to develop.

James 3:13-18 gives us a description of God’s wisdom which produces good deeds done in gentleness. A person can be judged to be wise or not by the kind of life they live. I find the description of wisdom from above in verse 17 useful in determining if my behavior or plans are wise by God’s standards. True wisdom is: pure (eliciting reverence, sacred, free from the self), peaceable, gentle (considerate, equitable, fair, mild), reasonable (easily obeying, compliant), full of mercy (kindness or goodwill joined with a desire to help), unwavering (without ambiguity or uncertainty), without hypocrisy (undisguised, sincere) and bears good fruit.

What I have observed in myself as well as my faith communities gives evidence that we are missing God’s wisdom. When there is an issue or practice about which we disagree, our culture and “Christian” understandings call us to stand on our convictions and fight for what is right. Our Quaker history compels us to stand against injustice and lack of integrity. But the way we engage in the conflict reveals whether we are operating according to our own faulty wisdom or wisdom that comes from God and leads to peace.

*SONG: Grant Us Light*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for God’s wisdom to be yours when encountering conflict.*

—Leann Williams

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 4:1-6*

As a massage therapist I hold tension in my hands every work day. It is common practice to use pressure, friction, and stretching to relieve a muscle's tension. It's sometimes painful but usually works fairly well. Recently I learned a technique in which I gently hold a tight muscle in a shortened position and let it rest there to release tension. For many people the holding brings relief with far less pain than more traditional methods of massage. The technique reminds me of the instructions given in Ephesians 4.

We are instructed in Ephesians 4:3 to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." The way we hold each other in that effort can make all the difference. Often in conflict we hold on to our viewpoints with confidence and look for a position of strength from which to make demands. Verse 2 calls us to be completely humble and gentle, to be patient, and bear with one another in love. Only when we adapt these patterns of holding one another will we be working toward unity and peace.

Another way to hold each other that builds unity is given in verses 4-6. We are reminded that we are already united in one Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, and baptism. We are held together by one God and Father who is over, through, and in us all. Before speaking to issues that tend to divide us, we ought to pause and make sure we are holding one another in ways that keep the unity of the Spirit in our bonds of peace.

*SONG: We Are One in the Bond of Love*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me hold others in ways that lead to peace.*

—Leann Williams

*BIBLE READING: Ephesians 4:25-32*

Pain is an interesting phenomenon to study. Usually what brings a client to my massage practice is pain. Most often where a client feels pain is not the location of the cause of the pain. It takes work, patience, and good listening to determine the source of the pain. Usually pain is the result of several factors working over a period of time to bring an imbalance of some kind. When the pain is addressed changes in behavior are needed to prevent a recurrence and maintain good health.

Ephesians 4:25-32 gives us guidance in considering several potential source(s) of pain in our faith communities which we experience as a lack of unity. The list of suspect behaviors includes lies, anger, stealing, lacking useful work, dirty talk, bitterness, quarreling, harsh words, and malice. At first look, it may seem that these are unlikely sources of our pain, but prayerful reflection may reveal that we have been participating in some form of these behaviors. Repentance is called for.

We are all members of one body and when there is a lack of health in one area we are likely to feel the painful effects elsewhere. Once the sources of our pain are dealt with, it is necessary to put healthy habits into practice. The passage instructs us to be kind and compassionate to one another while forgiving each other in the same way God forgives us.

May God open our eyes to our unhealthy habits that cause pain to the body, and give us the wisdom and strength to implement practices that lead to health and peace.

*SONG: If My People's Hearts Are Humbled*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Ask God to open your heart to see ways you may be contributing to the lack of unity in your faith community.*

—Leann Williams

*BIBLE READING: Colossians 3:12-17*

As a massage practitioner I am aware of many ways in which massage can contribute to healing and maintaining good health. There are a few conditions, especially unstable heart conditions, for which massage is not considered appropriate. When a client's heart is stable, massage can contribute to better health. In Colossians 3, I find three heart conditions which contribute to health and unity in the body of Christ.

Colossians 3:12-14 describe the behaviors that lead to unity. When everyone is in agreement it is not difficult to follow those behaviors. But when we are in disagreement it becomes a challenge to hold the ones with whom we are in conflict with compassion, kindness, gentleness, and patience. When we feel we have been sinned against in a conflict, forgiving, bearing with, and loving the offender become much more challenging.

Verses 15-17 give us instruction in the heart conditions that can promote actions that lead to unity. First, we are told to "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." For me this requires trusting that God is in each of us and can lead us together in spite of ourselves. Second, we are reminded to be thankful and that whatever we do in word or deed must be done giving thanks. Finally, we are told, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly" while nurturing our faith community with gratitude. We must not let conflict distract us from living into the message of Christ as his followers.

When we find ourselves in conflict, it is crucial to check for heart conditions that impede unity and cultivate those that lead to unity.

*SONG: Holy Spirit, Light Divine*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, let peace and gratitude rule my heart even in conflict.*

—Leann Williams

*BIBLE READING: Romans 14:1-4, 10-13, 19*

There's some pretty straight talk relating to conflict in Romans 14. Don't quarrel over disputable matters. Stop passing judgment on one another. Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification. I think we get stuck on what is disputable and what isn't. But, at the heart the issues we hold in conflict are similar. We argue in Christian community over how best to live out our calling as Christ's followers.

Queries are thought-provoking questions aimed at causing us to reflect on our own responses to God. In our efforts to do what leads to peace, queries can offer an opportunity to listen for God's redirection. Below, I offer queries I have written based on the passages we have read this week.

- How does my attitude elicit reverence and draw my heart to see the sacredness of others?
- How do I show consideration for others, seeking to be fair and yielding to others whenever possible?
- In what ways am I willing to comply with the needs, desires, and preferences of others?
- How can I work to develop goodwill toward those with whom I disagree by actively helping or serving them?
- How do my actions in this conflict show humility, gentleness, and patience?
- How do I hold peace and gratitude in my heart during this conflict?
- What pleasant or useful results come from my position or attitude in this conflict?

*SONG: Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, show us how to live in unity.*

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