

The Winter Olympics just ended, with the United States winning more medals in history, but not the one they wanted – the Gold Medal in Hockey. One of the things that I found interesting was not only was there competition between the participants in other countries, but also within their own teams.

For example, there was some conflict between Lindsay Vonn, the American skier, and one of her teammates. The US team was not one big happy family. And then there was the hockey teams – where players who normally would be competing against each other during the regular season, suddenly find themselves teammates. And they had to put aside any animosity or differences they might have for the sake of the team, in order to succeed.

The same is true of us as a church, because we are called a “church family.” We all come from different backgrounds – economic, social, professional – and so we have to put aside our differences in order to be one. There needs to be unity based on our common faith that overrides the differences that we might have.

In our gospel lesson this morning our Savior teaches us something about the unity that we are to have — the oneness that should be evident in our church — indeed, in every church. Turn with me to Luke 11 beginning at the 14<sup>th</sup> verse.

The picture that we have before us is that Jesus was casting out demons — and as we read, it was mute — that is, the demon had caused the person to be mute — he could not speak. After the demon had been cast out by Jesus, the mute man spoke and as a result of this — the crowd marveled at the power of Jesus. The miracles that Jesus performed elicited this type of response — just as it should from us. When we see something miraculous... something beyond the ordinary — we should marvel — and among other things, praise God.

But as always — there those who were against Jesus — and so instead of marveling along with the people — they began to criticize and accuse him — we read: 15 *But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."* They were not denying that Jesus had cast out a demon — but what they were doing was ascribing his power to Beelzebub — the ruler of the demons — in other words, they were saying that Jesus was of the devil or Satan — and not of God. Quite an accusation — but then again, some people just will not or cannot believe.

You might remember the story of the man born blind from John 9 — here was a man — who was well known by all to be blind — he had been a beggar for years — and Jesus healed him — and the Pharisees just would not believe that he was the same man and that he had been blind.

They kept asking him... they asked his parents... they kept asking others — and finally the man said: *“Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.”* — at which point they cast him out — they just would not believe.

Here in Luke 11, they attribute the miracle to Beelzebub — the ruler or the prince of the demons. But not only did they attribute his miracles to Beelzebub — they also tested him by saying: *“show us sign”* — as if what he had just done was not sign enough of who he was.

Jesus is very quick to answer them and in his answer teaches them — and us, a couple of things. One thing that he says — and this is important — but not our focus of today — he says in verse 20 *“But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”* Many were looking for a earthly kingdom with the Messiah as their king — but what Jesus is tell them is that the miracles that he is doing is evidence that God’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom — a kingdom where the power of God is at work. The miracles of Jesus demonstrated the presence of God's kingdom on earth. He defeated Satan rather than aligning Himself with Satan.

There is also a future kingdom that awaits us — a heavenly kingdom — a kingdom of which all Christians are members of — but the thing that Jesus taught was that the kingdom had come to them — in the person of Jesus Christ — and he wanted them to know it.

The other thing that he teaches — and the teaching that I would like to spend the next few minutes on is where he says — 17, 18: *“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub.”* And verse 23 *“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”*

What Jesus is saying is that Satan could not be casting out his own demons — because that would mean that there would be division, if you will, in the house of Satan. Satan — a demon — would not be casting out another demon. God’s kingdom is one that is against demons — so therefore Jesus has to be of God kingdom — or else he would be presiding over a divided kingdom — a kingdom where demons were against demons.

To use another sports metaphor — earlier this season, the Flyers replaced their head coach, because the team was not winning. I don’t know what the problem was, but they soon began winning under their new head coach. They began playing like a team ... like a happy family.

When I was in the corporate world — I saw similar things. People who were unhappy with their positions and their salaries — so they didn’t try as hard... they didn’t work as hard. They were divided — and hence they did not accomplish as much... they didn’t sell as much... they didn’t make as much money — for themselves or the company.

What does that mean for us as Christians and then as a church. Notice the words of Jesus in verse 23 — *“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”* There is the Kingdom of God and there is the kingdom of Satan — a person belongs to either one or the other. These are the only two choices.

Notice that there are two things that he says — first he says *He who is not with Me is against Me*. In Mark chapter 9, we read this account — where Jesus puts it more positively: *“Now John answered Him, saying, “Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.” But Jesus said, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side.”*

You see — there are only two options — we are either on the side of Christ — or we are against him. There is no neutrality. I have often told you that we need to tell others about Jesus Christ. Remember, we are all witnesses to Christ — some of us are good witnesses — and some of us are not.

I know that I have to be careful as to how I drive because I have a “Pastor” sticker on my car. If you have bumper sticker or an Ichthys – the fish, indicating that you are a Christian, you should watch the way you drive. You don’t drive 80 miles an hour with a “God is My Co-pilot” bumper sticker on your car!

The point of all this is that we are witnesses for Jesus Christ in all that we do and in all that we are. There is a world out there that does not know Jesus Christ — and we might be the only witness that they ever come across — we are either for him or against him.

But Jesus goes even further — when he says: *and he who does not gather with Me scatters*. We see again, that there is no neutrality — in fact, it goes beyond that to the fact that if we are not gathering for Jesus Christ — then we are scattering — meaning that we are leaving them out there to be gathered in by Satan.

So, if we say that we are with Jesus — then it means we are instrumental in gathering people to be his followers. Proverbs 11:30 says: *“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise.”* Jesus himself said: Luke 19:10: *“for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”*

As I said — there are multitudes of people who don’t know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. If we believe — and this is what the scriptures teach — that Jesus is the only way of salvation — then we need to be witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ to them. And the time is now. Jesus said in Matthew 9:37: *“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”* In relation to the rest of the world — to those around us — as Christians, we are in the minority.

Think about where you work... think about your families... think about your neighborhoods — and you see that this is true. That is why Jesus said: *“Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.”*

This is what we are to be doing — we are to be out there being witnesses for Christ — and we are to be united in doing this. We need to be united as people... to have the same goal... to see people come to Christ.

As I said, we all come from different backgrounds — different ethnic backgrounds... different economic backgrounds... different social backgrounds... — and yet there is one thing that we all have in common — one thing that we are all the same in — if we are Christians — we have all been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ — it is the one thing that we have in common. And because of this — all the other differences fade into the background... all the other differences pale in comparison.

This does not mean that we will agree on everything — and that is true of any relationship — but what it does mean that we should be united in what is of the utmost importance — that is, reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we do this — people will come to know Christ as Savior — and the church, as a by-product — will grow. So let us think about this — and the example that Jesus has set before us. Let us strive to be united in this common goal — to see those without Christ — come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.