

20th Sunday after Trinity 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Father in heaven, we humbly come before your word, a very rich and dense and in some cases difficult text to understand, and we pray that you'd give us humility to learn and to submit to your word. And Lord, we also ask that you'll open our eyes to what you would want us to see this morning. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

If you've been watching the news at all, last week in Vancouver, a group of anti-Israel and anti-West and anti-Canada demonstrators, they publicly burned a Canadian flag. After and during the burning of the flag, the leader led them in a chant of burn Canada. A few other things they wanted to burn as well, but burn Canada was heard loud and clear. They're clad in masks. We have no idea who these people were. The police were said to look into it. I'm not sure. I don't know of any updates. I didn't go digging around. But it would be safe to assume that these people were Canadians themselves, at least some of them, either through birth or immigration. Either way, they would hold Canadian citizenship. I was thinking about, apart from the obvious, I'm a Canadian. I'm thankful and proud that I'm a Canadian and I don't like seeing the flag burned. But I was wondering why it made me so unsettled to see the flag burned. I think for me, and maybe for you as well, the Canadian flag, it represents the ideals of Canada and our shared citizenship, the things that bind us together as Canadians. I say ideals because ideally we'd hold on to these. Maybe they're not held so tightly anymore. But by and large, the Canadian flag, it ought to represent our shared values for tolerance, that many people from different backgrounds can live together and coexist, for equality before the law, just to name a couple things. The flag, ideally, is the thing we rally around as Canadians. The flag is our point of reference. Especially in this Olympic year, the summer that we had, it's a wonderful time to be a Canadian. So it represents our unity, our national pride, and unfortunately, less and less, this is appearing to be the case. And so the Canadian flag goes up in flames on the streets of Vancouver.

And people like myself lament it, but it's a bit unsurprising. I bring that up just to talk about the flag itself as being the very thing that is what we rally around. It represents our ideals.

And I want to ask this morning, what is the unifying ideal for Christians? What is our flag, so to speak? The thing that we rally around, the thing that unifies us, the bond that transcends, as Christians, national pride, even our civic duty. What is the thing that unites Christians?

The question's easy. It's also very hard. It's easy because we could say it's Jesus. That's what unites us. And it's incredibly difficult in some cases because even though Jesus is the center and we are on the periphery, but he's connecting us all, he is the hub and we are the spokes, and he is the source of our unity as Christians, we have a real tough time to find things that we agree on. Maybe not necessarily this church, but Christianity itself across our province, across our country, across our continent, across the world. What unites us is hard to understand, and if we're being perfectly honest, quite elusive. The Christian churches across Canada, for instance, even if you look at Ottawa, differences in emphasis, cultures, practices, styles, and certain doctrines that are held dear in the church. I'm not saying all differences are bad, but where there is differences, unity is not necessarily easily come by.

[4 : 50] So, how do we debate well? How do we consider well? How do we unite well? How do we come to consensus well? And how do we struggle even to get to the table to have that conversation?

So, Jesus is our rallying point, but how do we come into this unified group? How do we come to call each other brother and sisters, arm in arm, hand in hand? So, we're at Acts 15. This text is a key text for just this question. It's the midway point of Acts, both pretty much in terms of its structure of Acts in the narrative. It's kind of at the halfway point, but it's also the midway point of Acts where there's a clear shift towards the spread of the gospel and the building up of the church. What we see in Acts 15 is the Jerusalem Council, as it has been come to known, come to be known, and it's the first such, it's called ecumenical council, the universal or where all of the church comes together in one spot.

There'll be councils afterwards, but this is the first one, and it's in Jerusalem. It's a huge turning point in the narrative of Acts, for it both defines what true salvation is, and by extension, what true membership in the churches is, it also provides us a blueprint for how to deal with differences, doctrinal differences within the church. Okay, mountain in Acts 15. It's a mountain. We're not going to scale to the summit addressing every little bit. We'll read the entirety of it by the time we finish up this morning, but I'm going to point out just a couple things, and I've already mentioned them.

Acts 15 will help us to understand what the true definition of salvation is according to God's word, what that looks like, and by definition, what membership in his church looks like. And then the third thing that we'll investigate is a blueprint for navigating doctrinal differences.

Huge implications for the church, but huge implications for how we live our life and how we enjoy flourishing as human beings in God's creation. So let's jump to it. If you have one of these, turn with me, like I mentioned, page 86, and read verses 1 to 5.

[7 : 31] But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles and brought great joy to all the brothers. We'll continue on to read verses 4 and 5. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, it is necessary to circumcise them, that is the Gentiles, and to order them to keep the law of Moses.

Many people romanticize the early church as the key point of purity and unity within the history of Christianity. And we get to Acts 15 and we see within the first generation, within the first generation, there's dissension, there's debate. It's not exactly so pure and clean and without blemish.

Everybody linking arms, everybody in one accord. We have instances of that early on, but within a generation, we're seeing debate and issues arise. Sex even developing. Here we see that there's some converts from the Pharisees who are promoting this distorted view of the gospel that they're saying, hey, listen, yeah, you have to have faith in Jesus, but you also essentially have to live like an observant, law-keeping, Torah-abiding Jewish person. And carton parcel to that is circumcision.

Before we address this, I just want to say this. These aren't the Pharisees that are trying to thwart Jesus in the gospels. These are brothers and sisters in the faith, except that they're believing a false gospel. They love Jesus, but they have a distorted view of what it means to walk with Jesus and to serve with Jesus. I would say that we need to be careful to demonize them, but rather show some sympathy to them for two reasons. They left Pharisaical Judaism to follow Jesus. They're part of the Pharisee group, which is to say that they just have those leanings. They haven't kind of abandoned those leanings. You're in the church long enough and you have the privilege of seeing people come to faith from, say, a different religion or a different practice or a different kind of spirituality. They don't do away with everything overnight.

It's not like a switch is flipped and then within moments they don't, they stop thinking like a Muslim or they stop thinking like a spiritualist or they stop thinking like somebody that is obsessed with money. It takes time. This is what the Bible calls sanctification. It's God working in us and through us to change our view towards him. This is what's happening here. These aren't enemies. These are brothers that are confused. The second thing why we should be sympathetic towards them is that they really want to follow God's law. They really want to be concerned about the Bible. I mean the New Testament's not written right now, so they're trying to follow the Bible. Wrong way of following the Bible, but they're trying to follow the Bible. So they're brothers in Christ, but brothers who are confused about salvation in the church and the place of the Gentiles, nevertheless, even if we're sympathetic to them, they're causing problems, dissensions, debates. They're, we'll see, hoisting upon the non-Jewish believers in Jesus a yoke that was never intended for them. What's interesting today amongst Jewish people, and it has been for centuries upon centuries, is can I be Jewish and believe in Jesus? Here it tells us that the original question is, can I be not Jewish and believe in Jesus? This is what's at play here in Acts 15. Were they just these Jewish believers? I mean, they were worshiping the Jewish Messiah from the Jewish scriptures, walking according to the Jewish Torah, with Jewish patriarchs, all of the Jewish hope. Are they to abandon that? This is the question. Are they to abandon that for the Samaritans, for the Phoenicians, for the Cypriots, to those in Antioch, to those in Pisidia, in Asia Minor, in Rome, in parts of Asia? Are they supposed to abandon all of that for these Gentiles?

[12 : 44] It's a big question. It's a big question. What's at stake here isn't just, can Gentiles remain Gentiles?

It's, does the gospel destroy culture? Does it destroy our heritage? It's a scary thing to ask. It's a good thing to be proud of where you're from and the people you're connected to.

I mean, within moderation. I'm not talking about like, like Nazi pride or something, but like a good pride. I'm thankful for the parents I have and where I came from. I, I'm privileged wherever I am.

I'm thankful for the life I have. The gospel comes and offers us true life. And the questions asked, do I have to give up everything? Scary.

So, Paul and Barnabas, they're pushing back against this question. And they are proclaiming a gospel of faith in Christ alone, not compelling the Gentiles to become Jews. They're not asking them to have Jesus plus anything, but just Jesus.

[14 : 00] So, we have these two sects within the Christian church early on that are promoting two different faiths. How are they to be dealt with? Look with me now in verse 7. Before we get in there, there's going to be three successive testimonies on behalf of the true gospel. It'll be Peter, it'll be Saul and Barnabas, and then it'll be James. We're going to just jump into Peter's bit here, starting in verse 7 to verse 11. And this will tell us a little bit about what true salvation is.

Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. What he's referring to, by the way, is a few chapters back, and likely about a decade prior, where Peter gets a vision and goes by the Lord's leading to Cornelius, who is not a Jewish person. He is a Roman soldier and proclaims the gospel. They believe the Holy Spirit is given, and this is what Peter's referring to here.

Verse 8, And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, that is Cornelius and his household, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us. And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. Notice a few key points here. Peter references the story of Cornelius and his household coming to faith.

It was by divine will that it happened. If you remember, Peter has this vision, and it's God speaking to him to associate with people that he previously deemed unclean. It was God who made the inroads into Peter. And God also, we find out later, made the inroads into Cornelius, opening his eyes, connecting the two. And when Peter proclaimed the gospel to Cornelius, he did not compel him to become Torah observant. He did not compel them to get circumcised. No. In verse 7, they hear the word that is the gospel message and believed. Faith was at work. And that's all Peter ends up talking about here. That's it. It's just faith. They heard, they believed, it was faith, it was the gift of God to these Gentiles. And what's interesting, too, in all of this, is that God bore witness to what he was doing to the Gentiles. How? By giving the Holy Spirit. And then he says, just like it happened with us, and he's referring to Acts chapter 2, where the Holy Spirit falls on the Jewish pilgrims when they're in

[17 : 05] Jerusalem. And it's a fulfillment of prophecy, the God verifying that he is at work saving people. And the same pattern of events is happening with Cornelius. And he is not a Jew. He is a Gentile. And he is going to stay that way for the rest of his life. True salvation, what we see here, it's always a matter of the heart. It's always a matter of the heart. The heart that hears the gospel message and turns to Christ by faith and enjoys the cleansing that only God can do. The indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that is given. All of which, Peter says, at the end of this section, is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's all through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. A gift from above by God himself.

And what does this result in? He says, Peter, that there's now no distinction between Jew and Greek. And that's not my opinion, he says. God is the one who said that. So if you have a quarrel with what we are saying, listen, you're not quarreling with me, Peter, the former fisherman. You're quarreling with God himself because he is the one who's bore witness to all of this. It's a heavy, heavy statement, but it is true.

No ceremonial conversion to Judaism, but a spiritual conversion of the heart all by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. And friends, I'll just say this. Why is this a good news for them and also for us today?

It's because such a salvation that is not our own doing. It is by the grace of God that we receive by faith. It is a gift for us. It is no small matter because it both obliterates pride and it smashes hopelessness.

And if you're following along, even on the periphery, there's a lot of pride and a lot of hopelessness today. There's a lot of it. So it's good news for us. How does it obliterate pride? It does so because the heart that revels with pride in either achieving enlightenment or perfection or nirvana or some kind of connection to the above or thinking that I am somehow, all of that doesn't apply to me. I'm good where I stand right here. That heart is not just a part of the problem. It is the problem. If you're familiar with the seven deadly sins, pride is the king of the sins by which all of the other sins can take root and germinate and grow and bloom.

[20 : 07] Pride needs to always be fixed. And therefore, the idea of salvation through self-achievement, be that keeping the Torah law or just thinking, no, I'm okay, I'm good the way I am, it's inherently flawed. It is, and I have no idea why we use this. It's like pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps.

It's an impossibility. It's impossible. It's inherently flawed. Likewise, hopelessness. Why does it smash hopelessness? Hopelessness, it falsely states that there's no way out of the pit, that the dark is too dark. The light isn't good enough. The life that it's offered, it's not going to deliver what it's promising. Things are too far gone. Life lacks hope. But like with pride, a salvation that does not offer and satisfy the longing for hope is no salvation at all. So, it would take the very person of God himself to take upon human flesh, to die in our place, to live, to die in our place, to defeat death, to rise again. That's the hope we put our, that's what we put our faith in. That's our hope.

And if the object of our hope defeated all of the things that cause us hopelessness, my goodness, that's an antidote to the hopelessness of our society.

As we transition to the next bit, the next point, there can be no plurality of thought when it pertains to salvation by grace through faith. There can't be two competing gospels. There can't be a 1A and a 1B. There can't be a Jesus and then a Jesus plus whatever, fill in the blanks.

So much rides on a proper definition and understanding of salvation, for it has implications for both belonging to Christ and to his church. And this is where we'll jump to the next section.

[22 : 16] Look at verse 13 and following with me. So, I'll back up. Verse 12. Paul and Barnabas, it's one verse, but it's like a, we could double click on that, but we'll just read it. And all the assembly fell silent. That's at what Peter has just said. And they listened to Paul and Barnabas as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. That's, we're presuming that's the first missionary journey that we talked about the last three weeks. Verse 13. After they finished speaking, James replied, brothers, listen to me. Simeon, that's Peter's Jewish name. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name. And with this, the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written. He's going to quote Amos chapter nine here.

After this, I will return and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen. I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore it that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old. We're not going to deep dive into this prophetic quote of James and not a lot of time on this point because we've covered some of this already. However, what James is claiming here is that as Gentiles have come to faith, that Gentiles being in Christ, now they belong to the people of Israel in a very real spiritual way.

James, he is a leader of the church in Jerusalem. He is a Jewish man himself. And what he is doing is he is describing the conversion of the Gentiles using language that up till now has only been applied to Jewish people. This is a bit of a scandal because the Jewish people in Israel, they've existed by being distinct and the times that they haven't been distinct where they've wanted to be like the nations around them have led to their downfall. So they're very cagey on who is and who isn't in the in crowd. And here, James, he is using language that is exclusive to the Israelites and he's applying it to the Gentiles. So words like visitation and speaking of the Gentiles as a remnant are very Judaic words to use. And yet he is not using it to describe the nation, singular, that is the Jewish nation, but the nations which come to describe people from every tribe and tongue, every part of the world.

Not only that, the quotation of scripture speaks to this expansion of David's kingdom. If you remember, King David is like the king of kings, the king that the Messiah will come from.

That this kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and now it is expanded to include people that did not belong to this kingdom beforehand. And finally, if we take a look at the letter written to the Gentile church, this is the portion that Matt didn't read, verses 23 and following, which is to say a summary of the debate and a letter written to the Gentile churches informing them of all that went down in the Jerusalem council. If we look at that letter, it is written from the brothers to the brothers.

[25 : 59] From the brothers to the brothers. Not from the master to the slave. Not from the clean to the unclean.

Not from even God's chosen wonderful race and those people that have kind of just slipped in in the back door. It's brothers to brothers. That is not a small detail. That's a huge detail. It's huge.

Distinctions remain. Jews are still Jews. Gentiles are still Gentiles. But those important identity markers are superseded by new and eternal identity markers.

That is, before we are Canadians, we are Christians. No longer do ethnic and familial and social and economic and regional and whatever other factors that come to mark us, they aren't the highest description of who we now are.

Rather, we are Christians. So our allegiance is still, say, to a Canadian flag, but it's, we have a higher allegiance to a different flag. And this flag is eternal. And around this flag are people from every tribe and tongue.

[27 : 20] It is a beautiful, a beautiful family that we have been brought into. Full inclusion into the people of God.

He does not have two peoples. He has one. And as we get to our final bit, looking at the blueprint for this unity, how to get and maintain unity within the church.

In Christ, Paul can say there's neither Jew or Greek, that all are one in Christ Jesus. But we need to be honest and open about the disputes and differences that mark the church.

From the beginning all the way to the present, that threaten to undo the unity and purity of the gospel message. And these differences and disputes, they threaten to burn down the flag.

Acts 15 provides a blueprint for how to achieve and maintain this unity. This perplexing section that I'm going to read, follow along with me, verses 19 to 21.

[28 : 20] It is no small portion of scripture to interpret. Verse 19. This is James now speaking.

Therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God. Okay, that sounds great. Verse 20. But should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

For from ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he has read every Sabbath in the synagogues. Four prohibitions.

Difficult to understand. Three seem to be ceremonial in nature. That is, the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, strangulation, which is a type of slaughtering, and the consumption of blood.

Things that we probably don't deal with. If you're like from England, you might enjoy yourself a blood pudding in the morning. It sounds disgusting. I looked up the ingredients, and it's not like, hey, it's called blood pudding because it looks red.

[29 : 30] It's blood. And anyways, if you like that, fantastic. Great for you. So there's three ceremonial prohibitions, and then there's one moral one.

And the three ceremonial ones, you could say, okay, we can figure that one out, but how does it work with this one moral one? Because the prohibition of sexual immorality, that is, any sexual knowing outside of a male and female marriage, it seems to be applied across all people.

It's binding on all people. So there's more, but there's two fairly mainstream ways to understand these prohibitions. The first, that all of these four prohibitions are somehow connected to foreign practices that were repulsive to Jewish sensibilities that were prohibited back in Leviticus 17 and 18 to foreigners living amongst God's people.

I'm not going to read portions of Leviticus 17 and 18. You'll have to take my word for it. Jump into it. I can see it. There's definitely a case to be made. I am not smarter than the biblical scholars that I consult.

So that's one view. The second is this, that these practices were seen as representative of paganism writ large and therefore also repulsive to Jewish sensibilities so that to become a Christian yet remain a pagan would cause a dissension, cause a disunity, a separation between the two.

[31 : 06] I'm not sure which one is correct. However, in both cases, it would seem that these prohibitions have more to do with making concessions for a portion of the church, in this case, the Jewish brothers in Christ, who may have been offended by certain practices and therefore to disregard their unease would be to not love them and therefore break fellowship in Christ's church.

Okay? Stick with me. So in other words, it would be to poo-poo the unity of the church. I think that's a decent way of saying it in layman's terms. The fact is, we all have our things that make us feel uncomfortable.

And we always feel seen and appreciated and heard when people can, one, articulate that and then make concessions for us.

Make exceptions. Help us. Maybe, even though that they can, for instance, drink alcohol, if somebody is a tea totaler and somebody recognizes that and they come for dinner, they don't bring wine.

Or they have you for dinner and they don't have wine, but rather they have some non-alcoholic drink. Oh, this person, they care enough about me to make this concession.

[32 : 27] This is like a loving thing to do. And this is, I think, what's happening here. And the reason why I think that is because in the very next chapter, the Apostle Paul, who is vehemently opposed to this sect of believers who are pushing circumcision, the very next chapter, he circumcises Timothy for the sake of the gospel being spread amongst Jewish people and non-Jewish people alike.

And you're like, wait, what? This is like exactly the opposite of what you've said. And it would seem to me that that for the church to stay unified means, like in any family, we make concessions.

Here's where the rub is. We can't make concessions that then go against our convictions. So, how do we navigate this stuff?

Either we embrace, in this case, unity, but we engage with heresy. Or, we have a pure doctrine and we're schismatics, which is to say that we're just separating from everybody because they're not spiritual enough, they're not clean enough, they're not focused enough, whatever.

You have two gutters. How do you navigate it? Heresy and schism. It's a huge problem. It's a huge difficulty. How do you do it? So, as that kind of sets the table, how then does, does Acts 15 lay out a blueprint for us to navigate these things?

[33 : 59] I'll say this, for the, for the Christian faith to be truly, truly unified, it has to be small c Catholic. That is to say it has to be universal.

That, that doesn't mean there's not differences because Catholic also means varied. To have a Catholic taste in music means to have an eclectic taste in music. So it has a bit of a double meaning here.

But for the, the church to be truly unified, it has to be small c Catholic. It must both avoid and make concessions to non-core beliefs that are sectarian in nature.

There's a, a great YouTube channel and, and, and the theologian, it's called Truth Unites by a guy named Gavin Ortlund and he calls this theological triage.

It's very helpful. We're not going to jump into it, but all that to say is the Christian faith can never bend on core beliefs. The Nicene Creed that we, we not just recited but proclaimed, that is, that's core stuff we need to believe.

[35 : 05] The Apostles Creed. We can't be wishy-washy on the Trinity. That's not, that's not a concession we make. We, we're not wishy-washy on the Incarnation. It's not a concession we make. The mode of baptism can be a concession we make.

It's, it's, it's important. It's not to say that the concessions aren't important. It's to say that they're not core, that the faith doesn't rise and fall with, with whether we do away with them or embrace them in, in a certain way.

The faith rises and falls if we say the resurrection didn't happen, but it does not rise and fall if we say, listen, this church, baptism by sprinkling, this church, baptism by full immersion.

It doesn't. They're, they're, they're modes we're discussing. We don't break fellowship over that kind of stuff. And there's a whole host of other things. This is why it's called triage, right? Because we have our core beliefs, but for secondary and third order issues, we can have unity with difference.

It's not to say that we don't wrestle and spar and, and read and push back and have discussions, a lot of which is like, there's a famine in our culture about that today.

[36 : 16] To wrestle with this stuff and to, hopefully, to come to at least an understanding of saying, you know what, I'm going to stick to this conviction or I see the way forward and I'm actually going to switch it.

this is what we see here in Acts chapter 15. The core beliefs, they are not, they are not sacrificed at all.

It's still salvation by faith. But, there's these, these wonderful, beautiful, lovely brothers that just struggle with Gentiles eating non-kosher.

So don't eat kosher. Eat kosher. It's not going to bother them. Like, is it going to, are you not going to get your nutrients? What are you worried about? You don't have blood pudding.

You'll live. For the sake of unity, what is that? We, we embrace it. We embrace other people's struggles. And I'm telling you, if you stand on your pride and say, I don't need to bend for somebody else, question if salvation has taken root in your life because what marks the Christian is love.

[37 : 29] It isn't the ability to just rail off all of the doctrines of the faith. Very important. But it's how do we love God and how do we love others, especially our brothers and sisters in the faith.

We have to do hard work. We have to search the scriptures for truth. The cry of the Reformation was *ad fontes*, which is back to the sources, back to the scriptures, and not a generation after the Reformation.

Another rallying cry of the Reformation was *semper reformanda*, which is to say the church is reformed and always reforming. We're always, we're always, we're always seeking God's face, seeking to reform, always coming under God's word.

Well, not just the book of Acts, but the entire Bible. God's word. We are submitting to it. It's a huge aspect of what it means to be a Catholic Christian. And that's why we will, we will say that, that we are Catholic, small c, and I will push it in this church and push other people to embrace it because this is what the heart of God is for the church.

And the Roman Catholic Church can't claim the word Catholic. It can claim the word Roman all at once, but it can't claim the word Catholic.

[38 : 55] And even still, and I'll say this, a little bit of polemics, and if you have issues, talk to me afterwards, I'm happy to discuss the issue with you. This is why the Roman Catholic Church isn't truly a Catholic church, but it's more sectarian.

Because what it does is it elevates, I would say erroneous, but we could call them secondary beliefs, but say erroneous beliefs, to primary doctrines, so that if you do not believe in it, you are anathema.

They are preaching faith in Christ plus circumcision. We cannot elevate anything above faith in Christ as the very core of what true salvation is.

That God has made a way irrespective of our ability and where we are at so that our hearts can be cleansed from sin. That we can know true joy, peace, that we can be in fellowship with one another because we are in fellowship with God.

God, we cannot elevate anything to that level. It is only grace by faith. So, to wrap it up, Christ died and rose again in order to make many people one.

[40 : 26] Yet, they remain different. Yet, they are one. Yet, they remain different. Yet, they are one. And when we see differences, he has given us the strength by his Holy Spirit as individuals but also as a church and as the church to do the hard work of figuring out how to make loving concessions for our brothers and sisters so that we will remain in fellowship with them.

And it reminds us that what truly unifies us, what is our true rallying cry, what is the flag that we pledge allegiance to. We don't do that in Canada but the flag that we pledge allegiance to it is Christ Jesus who is Lord of all and nothing less.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for the Jerusalem Council and there was much more that we could have read and plumbed but Lord, we pray that what we have read and what we have considered we've seen what true faith is, what true membership in your church is and a blueprint how to maintain that unity Lord, that we would take that to heart.

Lord, that we would be marked by people that love that would do, like your son, do away with our own prerogatives, our own rights so to speak for the sake of others, to put others before ourselves.

Lord, we ask that you bless us this week as we consider these things and Lord, may your church be continually cleansed and made whole and cleaned by your most precious son, Jesus Christ.

[42 : 12] To him be the glory. Amen.