

## **One for All and All for One**

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All of us have heard this declaration, or one very similar to it—"One for All and All for One." It was popularized by Alexandre Dumas, the famous French author who wrote a number of well-known novels such as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. If you have ever read *The Three Musketeers*, or seen one of the movies based upon this novel, you know that it's a swashbuckling tale about three superb swordsmen who reluctantly welcome a fourth member to their inseparable friendship as they defend the King of France against the plots of a villainous Cardinal Richelieu. First published in 1844, the novel was an immediate success and remains so today. Along with all of the difficult situations and dangerous circumstances in which these musketeers find themselves, this story is a vivid portrait of the inestimable value of true and genuine comradeship. "One for All and All for One," simply means that we're in this together. We have a common goal, a single purpose that compels us to work together without any thought of personal gain or glory.

The legendary coach, John Wooden, was well aware of this idea of "one for all and all for one," when he took over the basketball program at the University of Los Angeles. He wasn't interested in coaching a bunch of stars who wanted to show-off on the basketball court. In fact, he suggested that some of the most highly recruited players might not want to play for his team, especially since they wanted to hog all the action. He was interested in creating a team who knew the value of team work. They were a single unit working together for a common goal—being the best they could be both on and off the basketball court. How well did this strategy work? The results are impressive. Under his leadership, UCLA won ten national championships in just 12 years, a record that no other team has even come close to beating.

Although Joshua never played basketball, I suspect that he was well aware of the importance of creating a spirit of unity and common purpose when he took over the reins of leadership from Moses. He had seen what happened when there was strife and discord in the camp. He was aware of all those past accusations—"you have led us out into the desert to die"—and on several occasions there was even an open revolt against Moses' leadership. There was simply no way that he could lead a divided and grumbling people into a new land where they would face determined resistance from well-armed enemies in fortified cities. He knew that the fighting men of the tribes who had settled on the eastern side of the Jordan, who had already taken possession of their inheritance, could not be excused from

what was about to take place. They too were to cross the Jordan and join forces with their fellow countrymen. In other words, they were to be like the three musketeers "one for all and all for one."

Now, what does this mean for you and me as we look forward to the future right here at Bedford Presbyterian Church? Simply stated, **UNITY** is essential for any great endeavor.

**First of all, UNITY requires a clear understanding of what needs to be done.** Joshua was well aware of this as he prepared the people of Israel to enter into the Promised Land. He said to them, "In three days you will cross the Jordan River and take possession of the land the LORD your God has given you" (Joshua 1:11). It was vitally important for everyone to know what was about to happen. Clarity of purpose was an absolute imperative. There could be no confusion or discord regarding what they were about to do. The same is true for us. We need a clear understanding as to what needs to be done as we look to the future. And what is that mission and purpose to which we have been called? It is to find the person who will be the next pastor of our church. Now let me be very clear. Our purpose is not to find the person that we want to be our pastor. We must find the person that the Lord desires for us to call as our next pastor. The Old Testament account of Samuel's search for a new king is an unmistakable example of this important Biblical principle. God told Samuel to go to the home of Jesse in Bethlehem and select one of his sons to be the next king. When he got there he found seven strong, vigorous good looking young men. Naturally he started with the eldest assuming, that he was the most likely choice. However, he was wrong. "The LORD said, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart'" (1 Samuel 16:7). As you will remember, it was the eighth son, David, the youngest one, who was out in the fields taking care of his father's sheep that the Lord had selected to be the next king.

Having worked with two churches who were looking for a new pastor, I can tell you that finding the right person can be an exhausting endeavor. It involves a lot more than just looking over a few potential candidates. In one instance, we received over 150 resumes from individuals who were interested in becoming the pastor of that particular church. One by one, we had to review the resumes, selecting the top ten candidates, then the top five and finally the last two. One had already taken the pastorate of another church. The second agreed to visit the church where I was serving as the interim pastor. Just before the date of his visit, however, he contacted us and said that he was withdrawing his name from consideration. What were we to do? We thought it meant starting all over again until out of the blue we received a new batch of five resumes. Among them was

the name of a young man living near here in Roanoke. We contacted him and almost immediately we knew that he was the right person, the God ordained individual, who had been chosen to be the next pastor. Happily, I can tell you that he is still faithfully serving that congregation on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. What the Lord did for that church, He can do for us. We just need to make sure that we are looking for His choice, not our own.

**Second, UNITY is essential for any great endeavor because it requires the desire and the determination to work together.** Joshua told the people that no one was exempt from what needed to be accomplished. He said to those who were already settled on the eastern side of the Jordan, "Your wives, your children, and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers until the LORD gives them rest, as He has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them" (Joshua 1:14-15). The same is true for us here at Bedford Presbyterian. If we are to be successful during this time of transition, there must be a spirit of willing cooperation that is present throughout our church family. Let me share an illustration out of my own life and ministry.

When I became the pastor of the church where I served for thirty years, it was at the end of the summer in 1980. I knew what that meant. We would have to start nominating people to serve in the various offices of the church for the coming year. The church family had experienced some difficult times and there had been some disagreements among the membership. With that in mind I addressed the church's Nominating Committee. I said to them, "We've got a challenging task before us as we select those who will be serving on our church's various committees and organizations in the coming year. Some of them are discouraged and perhaps reluctant to continue serving. So here's what I want to ask you to do. Ask them to continue serving in their present capacity for one more year, so that we can get our church back on track. If we are to turn things around, unity, working together in one accord, is essential." Without exception every person who was contacted agreed to continue serving and that was the beginning of a new day in the life of that church.

Fortunately, our church is much more unified. We have a wonderful group of people who are serving this congregation. In the months to come, like my former pastorate, we will be going through the process of selecting leaders and committee members for the coming year. So here's what I want to share with you this morning. Working together is vitally important, whether it is serving on one of the church's committees or organizations, or simply making a promise to the Lord that you're going to do your best to be present when we gather together for worship. Your presence and participation in the life of our church is a declaration of unity.

Just like Joshua, that is what I'm asking you to do. Let's be honest. During the summertime it's easy to slip away and say, "They won't miss me." But in fact they will. In fact, we will. A church filled with a congregation praising the Lord is a whole lot more winsome than a nearly empty sanctuary with just a handful of worshippers. In 1 Corinthians 3:9 we find this admonition, "We are laborers together with God." Let this become our motto as a church family. Let it express our desire and the determination to work together.

**Finally, UNITY is essential for any great endeavor because it requires that we guard against strife and discord.** The people of Israel remembered the strife and discord which had almost destroyed them during the forty years that they had wandered in the wilderness. Over and over again they had almost been obliterated because they couldn't get along with one another, or the Lord. In fact, the entire generation of people who had left Egypt under Moses' leadership, were dead, buried in the desert, except for Joshua and Caleb. Their children, who were now gathered before their new leader, Joshua, didn't want what had happened to their parents to happen to them. So in response to Joshua's call to arms, all of them, even those from the eastern side of the Jordan, cried out with one voice, "Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death" (Joshua 1:18). That was a forceful declaration and I think they meant it because unity is impossible if there is strife and discord among God's people.

Saint Paul was also aware of this undeniable truth. Writing to the Christians in the church at Corinth, he said, "I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul', another 'I follow Apollos', another, 'I follow Cephas', still another, 'I follow Christ'" (1 Corinthians 1:10-12). This kind of disunity was tearing the church apart and Paul had to personally intercede to stop it. The Christians in Corinth were arguing over who was to lead the congregation, whose guidance and principles of ministry were to direct its life and future. That's a recipe for disaster that should never find its way into the life of a local church, especially when that congregation is looking for a new pastor. I have seen churches torn apart because more than one candidate was presented to a church family for consideration. So let's avoid that possibility by entrusting the selection process into the care of our Pastor Nominating Committee, in the assurance that they will find the person that the Lord has chosen to be our next pastor.

And in the meantime, let us all join together in declaring, like those three musketeers, **"ONE FOR ALL AND ALL FOR ONE!"**