



1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

Sunday, May 16, 2010

Sermon Texts: Psalm 97: 1-2, 6-7, 9
John 17: 20-26
Acts 7: 55-60; 16: 16-34
I Corinthians 1: 10-17
Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20

Sermon Title: "What's In a Name?"

Sermon Topic: Christian Unity

Sermon Purpose: To introduce information about the beginnings of various denominations, to relate a concern about our young people, and to admonish those with divisive minds.

.....
Sermon Prayer: Omniscient Teacher and Guide, keep our minds open to understand the Scriptures, for all that was written in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms were bound to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Help us to be prepared to be witnesses to all these things.

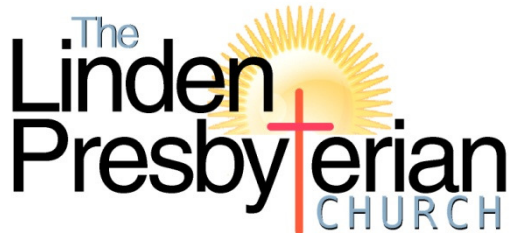
Now may the words of my lips and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

All the time I was growing up, my family told me "Never get too interested in your family tree. You'll probably find an ancestor hanging from it." I was never quite sure whether they meant I would trace my family clear back to the apes, or to some horse thief who was executed by hanging.

In college, I checked out my Native American heritage, but never traced the lineage any further back than six generations. Recently, however, just for fun, I decided to see just how much information I could find on the Internet by "Googling" "William C. Weaver." Here's what I discovered:

1. Nashville, Tennessee - Known as "Big Bill," his family founded a weekly radio program in 1925 to sell insurance. That radio show later became known as "The Grand Ole Opry." Died: December 10, 2007.
2. Known as "Buck," Lieutenant Colonel United States Army, in Enterprise, Alabama. Died: December 15, 2009.
3. Freeland, Pennsylvania – United States Army Master Sergeant, retired. School custodian. Died: November 21, 2009.
4. Jacksonville, Florida. "Billy" Weaver was a machinist and a member of the Sandy Hill Hunting Club who died on April 5, 2010.
5. Dallas, Texas. Died: December 9, 2009.
6. Montgomery County, Illinois – Died: 1988.
7. Coincidentally, there was also a William Weaver (in Texas) who was the son of a Clarence Weaver (from Halifax, PA) who died on January 3, 2010.





1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

It appears that there are only **two** William C. Weavers still living: a Professor of Finance (also with a Ph. D.) at the University of Central Florida, and myself.

So, what's in a name? According to the Internet, it can tell whether you are living or dead. Your name distinguishes you from other people and gives you a specific identity.

As many of you are aware, I hold a Ph. D. in Pastoral Counseling. My dissertation was on "Satanism in America" and it particularly addressed the involvement of young people in the growing movement of spells, incantations, animal sacrifices, torture, torment, and trouble: young people who have become disillusioned with the church and by the people in it.

With that in mind, let me share with you some historical facts and personal thoughts on the Christian Church. Why? Because we need to know who **we** are and what we're **about** before we even **attempt** to deal with the opposition.

We know (as a matter of our own personal profession of faith) that we believe in Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. We believe that Jesus **is** the Christ: the Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins, who was **resurrected** from the grave and **ascended** into heaven, and who **will** come again to claim us (as his own) to be received into heaven. We **believe** that! That's a "**given**." That's what we publicly professed when we joined with this congregation (or with any **other** Christian congregation – if we have any visitors among us).

But, what **else** do we know? I'm not going to stand here and give you a three-year Church History course in twenty minutes, but let me hit a few pertinent highlights for the purpose of later discussion.

In the year 1054, an event dramatically changed the character of the Christian Church. Until that date, Christians were "Christians." I don't mean like some people we may know who are "so-called Christians". I mean that when a person was asked about their faith, no one said they were Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, or Lutheran. The followers of Christ had just **one** name – **Christian**.

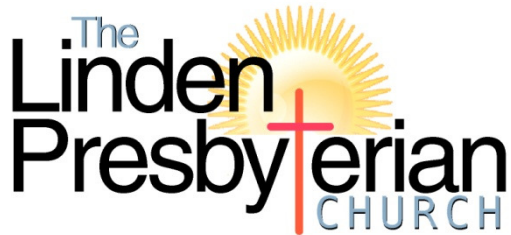
In 1054, the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Bishop of Rome had "a falling out." The Christians in the **East** took the name "Orthodox" (which means "true") and the Christians in the **West** took the name "Catholic" (which means "universal"). The unity of Christianity was broken forever.

In the fifteenth century, history **repeated** itself. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and the other reformers had **another** "falling out" with the Pope. The result was a number of **new** Christian churches with names like Lutheran, Reformed, and Presbyterian. Other Protestant churches were to follow.

When America was discovered and people from Europe came to these shores, they brought their **faith** with them, but they also brought their **religions** with them. Many Protestant churches were originally "language" churches. The worship service was conducted in German, Slovak, Swedish, or some other language.

Today, in the United States, Christians are divided into over 250 different mainline denominations, and about another 200 non-denominational houses of worship or organizations that have **fractured** from the work and worship of a traditional house of prayer and worship. Our nation **also** has an equal number of sects and cults operating on our soil. What began as a simple division in





1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

1054 has become a major fragmentation of the Christian Church. Today, in the United States, over 600 different religious bodies call themselves “Christian.”

To top it off, **each** of those religious bodies has been busily **slandering other** “Christian” religious bodies in an effort to secure new members – whether by drawing them **away** from another body, or by trying to **appeal** to those who have yet to make a commitment to Christ but are searching for answers.

It’s this **division** and **slander** that causes our young people to wonder about ethics, and loving behavior, and acceptance. “If this is the way ‘**Christians**’ behave, why would I want to **be** one?”

“Is this the way you teach **love** in **your** religion? Is it **love** to pick somebody apart because of the way they dress, or the way they speak, or the way they worship God: a way that is meaningful to them and according to commonly accepted scriptures? Is it “**love**” to hold yourself **above** someone else whose lifestyle may be different from yours, or who may have a disability? Why is the **Presbyterian** Church better than the Methodist or the Baptist? Why is the non-denominational church better than the Roman Catholic, or vice versa? How can ‘Bible-believing Christians’ say that?”

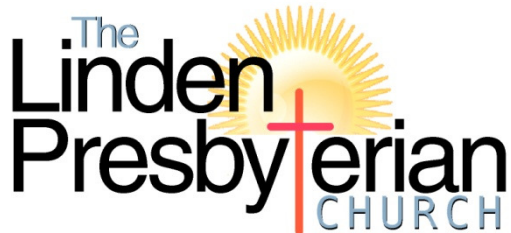
Now, I **know** we don’t have **anyone** who would do or say anything like that, here at LPC. But, from time to time, we all find ourselves at least “wondering” about questions along these lines or begin having bias feelings because of something or someone. We start wondering how what we **say** we believe reflects how we **demonstrate** our faith on an everyday basis.

It’s this very type of witness that leads people to search for something they feel might be **better**, and consequently makes them more **gullible** or **receptive** to the “shysters” or “con-artists:” the anti-social **cults** and **sects** that promise “true love and beauty,” only to deliver entrapment and prison terms for those performing acts **required** of them by these new-found religions.

Contrary to what we may **want** to believe, not **all** cults and anti-Christian Church organizations use drugs, sex, and mind control to entrap people in their organizations. Some people are **driven** into the clutches of such organizations by **our actions**! Listen to this: “Even within the confines of a given religion, the personal interpretations of God differ greatly. Some religions actually go so far as to label **anyone** who belongs to a religious group other than their own as a ‘heretic;’ even though the overall doctrines and impressions of godliness are the same. For example: The Catholics think the Protestants are doomed to hell simply because they do not belong to the Catholic Church. In the same way, many splinter groups of the Christian faith, such as the evangelical or the revivalist churches, believe that the Catholics are heathens who worship graven images. (Christ is depicted in the image that is most physiologically akin to the individual worshipping him, and yet the Christians criticize ‘heathens’ for the worship of graven images.) And the Jews have **always** been given the devil’s name.”

“Even though the God of all of these religions is basically the same, each regards the way chosen by the others as reprehensible, and to top it all, religionists actually **pray** for one another! They have scorn for their brothers ... because their religions carry different labels, and somehow this animosity must be released. What better way than through ‘prayer’! What a simperingly polite way of saying, ‘I hate your guts.’ It’s the thinly disguised device known as praying for your enemy! Praying for





1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

one's own enemy is nothing more than bargain-basement anger, and of a decidedly shoddy and inferior quality!"

Anton LeVay, wrote those words: author of "The Satanic Bible," who – in April of 1966 – became the founder of the First Church of Satan, in America.

"Giving the Devil his due," so to speak, LaVey's words **do** have the rational appeal of making sense to those who have been "turned **off**" by what they have seen and experienced within the fellowship of believers that we call "The Church." We tend to "fan the flames" or "add fuel to the fires" of bitterness, heartache, and pain that have divided families, alienated friends, and provided barriers to better relationships between and among God's people, for centuries.

We **cannot** lay the blame for what's happening to America's youth at anyone **else's** feet. But, by the same token, there's a whole lot **more** to it than **just** our petty prejudices against other races, economic levels, and religious expressions. As people of the Church of Jesus Christ – no matter the denomination, we must provide honest and faithful witness to what our Lord taught.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he prayed in the Garden at Gethsemane. A portion of his prayer is contained in today's Scripture lesson. Jesus prayed for his followers: "May they all be one. Father, may they be **one** in **us**." Today, many leaders in the Christian Church believe that the large number of Christian groups is a **denial** of Christ's prayer. These individuals would like to go back to the days **before** 1054, when there **was** but **one** Christian Church. I have to say, that desire has its **merits**.

Now, as we know, there are various kinds of unity. For – and among – Christians, I can think of **two** quite **different** kinds. First, in **any** group or groups, there can be **organizational** unity. This means that **everyone** belongs to a single group, held together by acceptance of the same rules and officers. (The United States of America is an example of organizational unity. We have a Constitution by which we are governed. We have a Congress and a President to make the laws for our nation.)

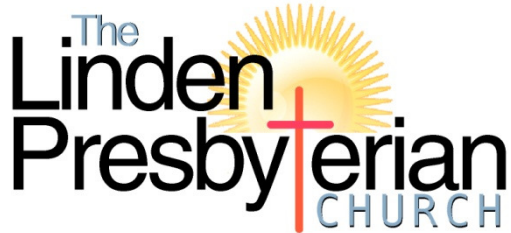
Then, there's the matter of a **spiritual** unity. The people of the United States do not always hold the same ideals and beliefs. In our day, many of us have heard people speak of the "**Ecumenical Movement**" and I know that term means different things to different people. The aim of the movement is to get the churches to become one organization; such as has happened to some degree through the Linden Interfaith Council. Some might say it's an attempt to turn the clock back to before 1054.

Spiritual Unity is based upon a **oneness** or **singleness** of belief or philosophy. People who love political freedom, for example, will sense a oneness, a commonality, even if one person is a citizen of the United States and the other is a citizen of France or Great Britain. They feel a oneness, as if "soul mates," because they believe in the same ideals.

I once heard of a clergyman who traveled to the nation of Burma. Now, Burma is a "closed country." By that, I mean that **no** visitor is permitted to stay in that nation for more than a week. Making reservations is difficult, since the mail service (in **and** out) of Burma is not to be trusted.

When this man arrived in Rangoon, the capital city, he spent **two hours** getting through customs. He had no idea how he would get to his hotel – if, indeed, he **had** one – or how he would get **around** in a nation whose language he did not know.





1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

When he cleared customs, two Burmese Christians greeted him. They had a car waiting to take him to his hotel. Although their English was not perfect, and his Burmese was non-existent, he wrote that he felt “more at home with the Christians of Burma than (he did) with some who were (his) neighbors in the United States.”

What brought these people together was their common faith in Jesus Christ. When Christ prayed that his followers would be one, I believe he was speaking of a spiritual unity. Whenever true Christians get together, regardless of their nationality or political point of view, they sense that they are a part of the same family and they experience a spiritual unity in Christ.

This point of view is set forth in one of the hymns of our day. It says, “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord. ... and we pray that all unity will one day be restored, and they’ll know we are Christians by our love...”

The story I’m about to relate to you has been attributed to John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist Church. **Any** denominational personage could be replaced for Wesley’s name. But, since I **heard** it this way, this is the way I shall relate it.

It seems that John Wesley once told of a dream in which he found himself at the gates of Hell. He knocked on the door and asked, “Are there any Roman Catholics there?”

The answer came back, “Yes, a great many.”

“Are there any Church of England there?”

Again came the reply, “Yes, a great many.”

Are there any American Episcopalians there?”

“Yes, a great many.”

“What about Presbyterians? Are there many of **them** there?”

“Yes, many.”

With some hesitation he asked, “Are there any Methodists there?”

The reply was the same, “Yes, a great many.”

Disappointed and dismayed, Wesley turned and walked away. Soon he found himself at the gates of heaven. There, he asked the **same** questions.”

“Are there any Roman Catholics there?”

“No, not a one,” came the reply.

“Any Presbyterians, Church of England, Episcopalians, or Lutherans?”

“No, not a one.”

“Any Methodists?”

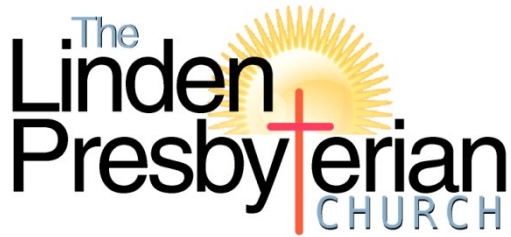
“Nope, nary a one.”

“Well, whom then **have** you here?” Wesley asked.

Came the reply, “We know nothing here of the names you have mentioned. We are all **Christians** here, and of these we have a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues.”

Today’s Christians need to **accept** and **love** each other in **this** world, as they will in the world to **come**. **Then** we will fulfill the prayer of Jesus, who prayed for us today: “May they all be one. Father,





1506 Orchard Terrace
Linden, NJ 07036-3807
908.486.3073
908-386.3079 Fax
www.lindenpres.org

Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
Manse: 908.925.4939

may they be one in us.” When that happens, we will be able to provide a true and faithful witness to the love of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We will be open and receptive, helpful and healing to those people we once rejected (either by our words or by our actions). And, we will put Satan in his rightful place: in the regions of Hell with no power to control our lives, or the lives of our loved ones. **Until** we do that, we only **contribute** to the **error** of a world that teaches “death to the weakling, wealth to the strong,” “strike first, strike hard,” and “self-indulgence is what life is all about.”

Let’s continue to be guided by the words of the Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Church at Corinth, as he says, “I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius; lest any one should say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanus. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any one else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”

Let us pray:

O God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, and Prince of Peace: Give us grace to seriously lay to heart the great dangers created by our unhappy divisions. Take away all pride and prejudice, and whatever **else** may hinder us from godly union and concord. As there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, faith and charity, and may we with one mind and one mouth glorify You; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

