

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people."

9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?

10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

[Pray]

#### INTRODUCTION

When we are reading from Paul's letters, this one to the church in Ephesus, it is well to be reminded that we are indeed, reading someone else's mail! The context for this particular letter is that Paul is imprisoned in a Roman jail, most likely under "house arrest". He is surrounded by Roman guards and perhaps other prisoners as well. There is a daily changing of the guard, so on an average day there are probably three different guards who take an eight hour shift. One could say, Paul had a captive audience! He did not waste any opportunity to share the good news--be it with his captors, or fellow prisoners. (He did the same when imprisoned in Philippi, with Silas, as recorded in Acts 16.)

During our VBS this last summer, the theme was the Underground church in Rome...where Paul was a prisoner. The two pastors from the Nazarene Church, Steve and Michael, portrayed Paul and his Roman jailor "Brutus". They were dressed in period costumes (think: togas) and

chained together in the jail. Each day the student groups would visit Paul in Jail and hear his testimony, etc. As the first day was coming to a close, one of the students - a boy about 6 years old - approached me, and demanded: "You've got to get Paul out of jail! "Did you see him all chained up? That's not right!! You've got to do something about that!!"

Paul's concern for the believers everywhere, was evident. He had a particular connection with those in Ephesus. And so he writes them a letter. Paul reminds them and us that he is "a prisoner for the Lord" (v1) as well as a prisoner Of the Lord. He does not view incarceration as a waste of time, but as an opportunity to further the Gospel.

It would not be too much of a stretch to think that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who died in a Nazi concentration camp for opposing Hitler, and Martin Luther King, Jr, who was incarcerated numerous times for non-violent protest of segregation in the early 1960s, were both inspired by the Apostle Paul to write letters from prison themselves. Today their letters serve as inspiration and instruction to us about those who put their faith into action, even when serious consequences resulted.

Perhaps you are familiar with Letter from a Birmingham jail - written by Martin Luther King, Jr. while he was incarcerated for his participation in non-violent protests of segregation during April of 1963.

*The letter defends the strategy of nonviolent resistance to racism, claiming that people have a moral responsibility to break unjust laws and to take direct action rather than waiting potentially forever for justice to come through the courts. In it he wrote: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere".*

Unity. Now that's a novel concept. Within our society today there seems to be division and partisanship at every hand: the reds states and blue states, the haves and have nots, the insiders and outsiders. Whatever the topic, there are strident voices on both sides of every issue. We are constantly assaulted with these voices in the media, daily all week long.

Then we come together on Sunday morning and hear Paul talk about unity, oneness. What world was Paul living in??? Surely not one as polarized as ours. And yet, it was not all that different (with the exception of mass communications!!) The world was equally diverse. Ephesus, was located in what is modern day Turkey. It was home to the Temple of Artemis, a Greek Goddess. This temple was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

*There was at least cultural, ethnic and religious diversity present in Ephesus.*

In her book <sup>1</sup>*Grapes of Wrath Or Grace*, Barbara Brokhoff tells the story of a group of American tourists taking a bus tour in Rome led by an English-speaking guide. Their first stop was a basilica in a piazza, which was surrounded by several lanes of relentless Roman traffic.

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<sup>1</sup> (Barbara Brokhoff, *Grapes of Wrath or Grace* (CSS Publishing, 1994), page 12)

After they were all safely dropped off, the group climbed the steps for a tour of the church. Following the tour, they prepared to cross the street to board the parked bus.

The frantic guide shouted for the group to stay together. He hollered out to them, "You cross one by one, they hit you one by one. But if you cross together, they think you will hurt the car! They won't hit you."

That's one concept of Unity!

Paul's message about unity is relevant to us today. It is not rocket science to see that the Christian Church is divided into numerous denominations--and while all claim that Christ is the sure foundation, the church is divided, splintered, nonetheless, which is evidence of our sinfulness.

Paul says the Unity and oneness of the church (both then and now)

1. Depends on the charity/generosity of our character and conduct (v.2)
2. Arises from the Unity of our God (v.3-6)
3. It is enriched by the diversity of our gifts (v. 7-12), and
4. It demands the maturity of our growth (v. 13-16).

To live a life worthy of our calling in Christ, it requires these essential building blocks. (Last week it was Legos, this week it is building blocks!!) They are qualities of our character, expressed in how we conduct ourselves. Sadly today, it seems that because some of our leaders speak without thinking about the impact or consequences of their words, their poor example gives permission to others to behave in a similar way. Name calling, is just one example. I need not say more.

Paul calls us to behave with Christ-like character: Humility, meekness, and patience, with forbearance and love toward one another. Frankly none of these come naturally to us in our broken humanity. In our natural, sinful state, we are proud, egotistic, overbearing, impatient, and possess a "my way or the highway" attitude which permeates all of our relationships. It does nothing to promote unity. Quite the opposite! These attitudes are antithetical to Christlike character and foster division.

The attitudes which Paul describes here, he writes about in his letter to the Galatians, as "fruits of the Spirit"! (Galatians 5:22-23.) These expressions of Christ-like character are the result of the Spirit of God at work within us/believers - redeeming our hearts, transforming our minds

(Romans 12:1-2) and making us more like Jesus. When the Spirit is within, we are changed. This transformation is evident in our words and our deeds

Unity is a result of this work of God in us, by the change agent known as the Holy Spirit so that we become humble, meek, patient, forbearing and loving in our relationships with one another.

Unity arises or has its origin, if you will, in the God whom we worship! This God is revealed to us in three "persons" or expressions: God the Creator/Father, God the Son/Jesus Christ, the incarnation, and God the Holy Spirit. Together they are known as the Holy Trinity.

**First**, there is one body **because** there is only one Spirit (v.4). We have focused on this in previous messages.

**Second**, there is one hope belonging to our calling (v.4) one faith and one baptism (v5) **because** there is only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified, buried, and risen again!

**Thirdly**, there is one Christian family, embracing us all (v.6) **because** there is one God and Father...who is above all and through all and in all.

And so **Paul sees the interrelationships** of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit **as being essential to the very life of the church and the unity that we can experience**. Our unity is an expression of God's activity in us and among us. Christ is made visible to the world, through our life together as the church.

Next - the unity of the church is enriched by the diversity of the gifts God gives to each one of us. (v.7-12.) Paul uses the Greek word for "grace"/"charis", which also means "gift" or "charismata". We are saved by grace - in that there is nothing we can do to earn or merit or deserve our salvation - we are saved by grace. Then God give us grace/and gifts which equip us to serve God's people "given in different degrees according to the measure of Christ's gift " (v.7)

**The emphasis today is on v.12-13:**

**12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

The whole reason God gifts us, is to equip us for serving others....first within the body of Christ, and then in the community. ***The goal being that our unity is ultimately expressed in spiritual maturity!***

Equipping involves training, which is an important part of our spiritual growth. Remember, the Greek word "disciple" means "learner. As Jesus' disciples, we are life-long learners. We never graduate from the school of discipleship! There is always more to learn! We never fully arrive, we are never completely mature. That said, there is almost always room to grow, even for those of us who have been following Jesus for a long time!

Somewhere lost in translation is the fact that the Greek word, translated here “equip”, comes from a family of words that describe restoration and healing. Among other things, it refers to the setting of broken bones during surgery. In fact, the same word is used in the context of Matthew 4 (v.21) when Jesus is inviting James and John to follow him. Matthew tells us that the fishermen/brothers were with their father, “mending their nets”. *Mending* is from the same family of words. *Mending and equipping* are related. **In other words: to equip may well involve mending or weaving back together the frayed edges of life, repairing brokenness vs. tossing something as useless; to restore rather than discard.** (Guy Sayles, [http://day1.org/3946-in\\_repair](http://day1.org/3946-in_repair))

**This is the good news of God’s grace: that we can find new purpose and usefulness in service to Christ and to our community. Equipping may in fact mean, giving another confidence to begin afresh.**

**Finally we are to grow up into Christ.** Growing up happens, maturity is optional. You know, it’s called the Peter Pan syndrome: those who never want to grow up?!

Last year NASA advertised a job. The job title? “Planetary Protection Officer”.

Described as a position responsible for the microbial footprint of humans during interplanetary exploration, it seems like one of the coolest jobs ever. To qualify would require expertise in just about every discipline of science possible: physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics and engineering.

However, those requirements didn't stop 9-year-old Jack Davis from submitting a handwritten note to NASA as his application.

"I may be nine (years old) but I think I would be fit for the job," wrote Jack. "One of the reasons is my sister says I am an alien. Also, I have seen almost all the space movies and alien movies I can see."

He then cited his plans to watch Men in Black as further reason why he should get the job. "I am young, so I can learn to think like an alien," he concluded.

Although the informal application did not result in a job offer, it did merit a response from NASA's Director of Planetary Science Jim Green, who wrote back: "Dear Mr. Davis: We are always looking for bright future scientists and engineers to help us, so I hope you will study hard and do well in school. We hope to see you here at NASA one of these days."

(Source: Daniel Uria, “Nine year old applies to NASA Planetary Protection Job”, UPI, 8-5-17.)

Jack’s enthusiasm did not match his potential abilities - yet. Spiritually what we lack in maturity we cannot make up for with enthusiasm, as important as that last quality may be. We need both/and not either/or. The Director of Planetary Science for NASA was in a role similar to Paul when he wrote nine year old Jack and encouraged him “to study hard and do well in school”. He needs what comes only with growth, experience, and time: maturity.

Spiritually we grow mature as we grow deeper in God's word and as we experience the Spirit's work in our lives, as we walk with others who also desire to "walk the talk" and live out the faith we say we believe. Maturity is a result, not simply of age, but of growth, experience and time.

To qualify for this position with NASA, one must not only possess a breadth of scientific knowledge, but understand how to apply it in real life situations.

In a similar way, to be spiritually mature is to grow up into Christ-like ways of being and living, applying biblical truths in real life situations.

Today before you leave I encourage you to pick up this document. It represents the work of the elders over the summer, as we interviewed community leaders in an attempt to put our finger on the pulse of Enumclaw: to better understand how this community is changing and what the needs and challenges are that face us all.

Please read this over and pray.

On p. 10 of the bulletin are some "assignments" for you to think and pray about as we consider how and where we as a church might become involved in our community.

We are called to "grow up!" and to serve Christ in this community. The needs are great. Our gifts are also great. May God guide and direct us as we move forward in faith.

Let us pray...