

Living Life Worthy of Our Calling

Ephesians 4:1-16
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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This sermon is going to take on a style more like a Bible study because I'd like to carefully walk through this passage of scripture from Ephesians 4. Verse 1 begins, "I, therefore..." Let's stop right there. Whenever a thought begins with "therefore," it indicates that what follows is predicated on what has come before. In this case, the first three chapters in Ephesians are primarily theological in nature, with a special emphasis on our being adopted as children of God into the family and kin-dom of God.

The "therefore" at the start of chapter 4 moves from the theological into the practical, moral, and ethical implications of what it means to be and live as a child of God. This focus continues through the end of chapter 6, the conclusion of this letter. As children of God, the author, assumed to be the apostle Paul, but that is questioned by many modern biblical scholars, begs and pleads that we **"lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called"** (v.1). In the Greek, the word "you" is plural, thus it is the entire community of faith (individually and together) that is being addressed. Also, in this scripture verse being "called" doesn't refer to a specific call, like feeling called to a particular profession. This calling is broader, referring to an **open invitation to live and be a member of the family of God.**

Hence, as a community of faith, we are to live a life worthy of this high calling. The best measuring stick, of course, is summarized by Jesus when he commands, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." That's a tough measuring stick, but a bit broad in scope. But thankfully we are also given more specific guidance in this passage from Ephesians.

We are to lead a life worthy of our calling **"with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..."** (v. 2). Let's look at that. Question: How **humble** are you? Am I? Are we? How modest, unassuming, and unpretentious? A fuller definition of being humble involves more than simply not thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. Yet, it also means to not think less highly of ourselves than we should. After all, **we are nothing less than children of God, infused with God's Sacred Presence within us.**

Next, as a child of God we are called to be **gentle**. Question: How gentle are you? Am I? Are we? This can mean having a mild temperament, being kind, considerate, tender, not harsh or severe. Perhaps there are some rough edges on each of us that could use some smoothing out. On the other side, we probably all know someone who looks like the toughest person in the world, yet we find he or she is actually quite gentle.

Next, a life worthy of our calling should also be marked by **patience**. Oh well. Two out of three isn't too bad, is it? How patient are you? Am I? Are we? The word for patience in Greek carries the connotation of endurance, perseverance, or steadfastness rather than just a passive kind of waiting. This kind of patience withstands

adversity without quitting. It endures opposition without striking out at an opponent with physical or verbal abuse.

Next, in addition to living life with humility, gentleness and patience, we are called to **bear with one another in love**. At one level or another, every relationship in life (whether personal, familial, with friends, at work, at the church) requires an element of bearing with others. Within our Presbyterian denomination, one of our foundational principles is grounded in what is called mutual forbearance. Written back in the 1700's, as our denomination was expanding and facing differences in theology and practice, this principle states, [and yes, I'm always thrilled at the opportunity to quote from the Presbyterian Book of Order]:

We believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men [and women] of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to **exercise mutual forbearance toward each other**. [Book of Order F-3.0105]

At the very least, this is a call to tolerance. But as our denomination today continues to become more inclusive and welcoming (both theologically and socially) there are those who simply could no longer tolerate remaining in relationship. Many pastors and congregations, therefore, left the PCUSA denomination. Ultimately, though admittedly things are more peaceful within our presbyteries, it was nevertheless **a tear in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**. Saying that, we are not being taught in this scripture passage to bear with one another in necessarily every circumstance. It will always be the case that victims of abuse will need to escape from the situation, or relationship, when danger dictates separation as the appropriate course of action. Also, bearing with another does not mean to become an enabler. Yet when possible, we are called to bear with one another in love.

(Just a quick note at this point. Hang in there, we're almost through with the first sentence in this passage.)

Where is all this heading? Here's the entire sentence. "I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**" (vv. 1-3). **It all leads to unity.**

How **united** are we? We've already taken a look at the recent history in our denomination. The United Methodist Church denomination is currently finalizing their process of an official split, a worldwide schism. And yes, it's primarily over the issues of LGBTQ+ inclusiveness.

It is beyond obvious, of course, that **we are witnessing the debilitating effects of disunity within our nation**, perhaps more so than at any time since the Civil War. In the political realm, there appears to be very little humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another, let alone in love and in a bond of peace. **As a nation, whether as Christians or not, we are not living up to our high calling as children of God. Living together in any sense of unity seems almost impossible to even imagine at this point.** Our disunity has morphed into extreme dysfunction, let alone deep animosity and resentment. Yet, **as Christians within the church, we are reminded that any unity is possible only because of the Holy Spirit working with and within us to bond us together**

in love. Mennonite pastor in Lawrence, Kansas, Joanna Harader, writes:

I'm gradually understanding that the Spirit's unity isn't so much about keeping everyone happy with each other as it is about tearing down wall so more people can get in. It's about the faithful path, not the warm and fuzzy path; about making us hear one another, not necessarily agree.

In fact, it is from our singular oneness in God we are able to acknowledge and affirm our diversity and that which makes us distinct. Here at College Hill, by God's grace and a lot of hard work, we have indeed been blessed to understand that **unity is not the same thing as uniformity.**

This biblical passage goes on to reveal that the use of our variety of gifts is to, **"equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ"** (v. 12). **That goal is ever before us.** And it includes equipping you, plural, for ministry. The Greek word translated here as "equipping" is also at the root of the word for "mending". That means dimensions of healing, wholeness, and restoration in each of our lives, which is also necessary to equip us for the work of ministry together. As a community of faith, working to build up the church and one another, we can and must help each other in this regard.

Well, I'm out of time and I only made it through verses 1-12. So, as a homework assignment, read the rest of this passage, verses 13-16, and you can do your own Bible study. We will continue to take a look at the rest of Ephesians 4 next week.

So, I'll leave you with this. I implore you, therefore, lead a life worthy of the calling with which you have been called as a child of God, so that together we may mature in our faith, using the variety of gifts of which we all have been blessed, to build up one another in love within the realm and kin-dom of God.

Amen.