

August 1, 2021
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Ephesians 4:1-16

CALLED TO UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the St Paul's epistle letter to the Ephesians, the 4th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

In the first three chapters of St Paul's letter can be summed up as "***the doctrine of the one holy Christian Church.***" God chose you and all people ***in Christ*** for salvation before the foundation of the world. (cf: Ephesians 1:4) You and all who are ***in Christ*** are saved, not by your works and deeds, but by God's grace alone, through faith in the One who bled and died for you on Calvary's cross. (cf: Ephesians 2:8–9) In His death and resurrection, He has united you and every tribe, language, people, and nation into the body of Christ... into one flock, making peace between God and all mankind. (cf: Ephesians 2:14–16) Christ Himself is your peace. So, we too, along with Paul, humbly kneel before our Maker, praying that He might strengthen us with His mighty power that we grow in the knowledge of Christ's love. (cf: Ephesians 3:14–16) For He alone is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. (Ephesians 3:20)

Our text this morning is a turning point in Paul's letter. He shifts from teaching the doctrine of the Christian Church – to how your life as a Christian is shaped in accordance with this doctrine so that there is unity in the body of Christ. He writes:

"1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1–3)

At first, this sounds like a Law statement. It sounds like something you have to do to earn salvation. [sarcasm on → "***You must walk in a manner worthy... or else. Jesus did all that for you, now it's your turn to do all this for Him.***" [← sarcasm off] But that's not what Paul is saying. The sinful man within each of us is quick to look for a way we can pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and cooperate in our salvation. But we can't. As I said earlier, you have been saved by grace through faith in Christ, neither by your works nor your walking. Apart from Christ you are a dead man walking in sin and your trespasses.

St Paul is not telling you what you ***must do*** – but ***what has already been done*** on your behalf. You ***have been called***. It's gift of God. The Holy Spirit has ***called*** you by the Gospel. You've

been *called* out of darkness into the marvelous light of Jesus who is the Light of the world. (cf: John 1:9; 1 Peter 2:9) Christ Himself is the One who makes your worthy walking possible. And because you have been *called*, St Paul urges you to walk in a manner appropriate to your *calling* as a redeemed child of God. What does this walk look like? Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And that's a problem for the sinful man. These attributes do not reside in any descendant of Adam. What does reside in you and me is pride and self-centeredness. You are by nature hard and impatient with your brothers and sisters in Christ, unwilling to tolerate their weaknesses and faults. How can you possibly create unity and peace? Again, St Paul is not telling you what you *must do* – but *what has already been done* on your behalf.

You don't create the unity. True unity was created by Christ's atoning death on the cross where He made us one with God. Just as God has called you, He has established unity in the body of Christ. That's why Paul urges us to "... ***maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***" This word maintain means "***to hold on to something so as not to give it up or lose it.***" (BDAG, 1002) It is your blood bought and God given unity and bond of peace – and you would do well to not give it up or lose it, bearing with one another in love, humility, gentleness, and patience. It's how the Christian lives. You cannot do it perfectly, but you have been given the Holy Spirit to shape your life according to the Christian doctrine.

Paul continues saying:

"⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:4–6)

As you confessed earlier in the Nicene Creed:

"... I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins..." (Nicene Creed)

The true Christian Church is not located in a building. It is wherever the Gospel is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution. (cf: AC VII) Only those who believe are part of the one true Church. It's the one body created by the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies all believers and keeps them with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. (cf: SC II 5) The Spirit has called you out of your sinful ***hopelessness*** into the ***objective hope*** of salvation in our one Lord Jesus. There is one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism – the baptismal waters by which you entered the holy ark of Christ's Church and were granted new birth in the Holy Spirit. And in this Church, there is only one God and Father of all. He is eternal without beginning or end. He's all powerful, all knowing, and ever present.

Paul says that in this one Church:

"... grace [is] given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Ephesians 4:7)

And what is the measure of Christ's gift? It is Christ crucified for sinners. It is Jesus' holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death where He drank the cup of the Father's wrath to the dregs. (cf: Isaiah 51:17) Because there is one body, every member of the body

receives the same measure... the fulness of Christ. To illustrate this thought, Paul continues by quoting the Psalmist saying:

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”
(Ephesians 4:8; cf: Psalm 68:1)

Picture in your mind freed slaves or prisoners of war parading behind a victorious king, being safely delivered home from bondage. After creating true unity in His body on the cross, defeating sin, death, and the devil, Jesus descended into hell to proclaim His victory. (cf: Ephesians 4:9–10) Forty days after His resurrection from the dead, He ascended back into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. Not a physical place but a position of all authority given by the Father, by which Jesus pours out the spoils of His victory, His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, setting the captives free. (cf: Luke 4:18)

Unfortunately, there are those who do not want unity in Christ. In an attempt to create their own kind of unity, false teachers preach misleading doctrines with cunning, craftiness, and deceitful scheming to suit the passions of their hearers. (cf: Ephesians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:3–4) Instead of building on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus being the cornerstone (cf: Ephesians 2:20) these wolves in sheep’s clothing lead many astray, tossing them to and fro so that they’re carried about by every wind of doctrine. (cf: Ephesians 4:14)

For this reason, Christ has given His Church:

“... the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”
(Ephesians 4:11–12)

God has given them to build up the body with pure teaching and preaching. To be sure, all who are in Christ are called to:

“... proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

In whatever your station of life or vocation, you are to share the word of the cross, Christ crucified to save sinners. (1 Corinthians 1:18–23) You likely come across more unchurched folks in a week that I do. But the pastor is called to ***equip the saints*** and ***build up the body*** through the Office of the Holy Ministry, forgiving you sins of not walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, and to proclaim the Gospel, and administer the Sacraments. So, invite your friends and neighbors to worship so that they, too, might:

“... attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (cf: Ephesians 4:13)

Where do you start? Paul says:

“... speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:15–16)

Jesus spoke the truth in love, whether it was Law or Gospel. Maturity in faith and unity comes by speaking the Gospel truth in love, which causes us to grow up into Christ who is the Head.

As I said last week, Christianity is not an individual sport. All who are in Christ are members of the whole body:

“...joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”
(Ephesians 4:16)

The Spirit creates a bond of peace that unites us as one. It is your blood bought and God given unity by which the Spirit strengthens you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, bearing with one another in love, humility, gentleness, and patience. Whenever the individual Christian performs the work for which he called and given, unity of the body is enriched and the members are drawn more closely together, living in peace and harmony with one another, sharing each other's joys and sorrows. Working through God's prophets, apostles, teachers, and pastors, the Spirit causes us to grow into Christ's body united under His Word.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.