



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Walk Worthy of Your Calling

Ephesians 4:1-10

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“It’s Pauline and she sounds angry.”

It was my first week working as an Apple Computer repair tech and the receptionist was telling me I had a call. I’d repaired Pauline’s computer that morning and now she was on the phone and angry. I didn’t know what to expect, but I knew there was no way her computer had the same problem. I picked up the phone and listened as Pauline yelled at me for a couple minutes because now her printer wasn’t working. This was a new problem. It didn’t make sense. I spent the next half hour walking her through everything I could think of to get the printer working. Nothing worked and she was getting angry again. I knew the printer was plugged into the wall, because we’d already verified the lights were on. “Pauline, this may sound really stupid, but the printer cable is plugged into the computer? Right? You plugged it back in when you got the computer home?” She bit my head off. “I never had to plug it in before!” she yelled at me. “Okay, well, nothing else is working so just humour me. Is there a cable plugged into the side of the printer?” “Yes.” Follow that cable to its other end and tell me where it goes. If it’s not plugged into the printer port on the computer, the computer can’t talk to the printer.” I heard grumbling on the other end of the phone, then a bit of swearing, and then she hung up. She didn’t call back. Problem solved. And thus began my career as a computer repair tech.

There were a couple calls like that every week. There was lady who delete an application from her iMac

and needed help to reinstall it. I told her to put the CD in the computer and then to double click it when it appeared on the desktop. After going round in circles for over half an hour I finally figured out that she didn’t know what a CD-ROM drive was. She was holding the CD up the screen and then putting the mouse on top of it and clicking the mouse button. As Veronica can relate, I had stories like this all the time. These were the ones with funny endings. A lot of them were just exercises in hair-pulling frustration. I had to listen as people fumed or cry when I told them their hard disk was dead and their data were lost. I had to call to tell them how much it was going to cost to fix their computer and then figure out what to do when they couldn’t afford it. But those direct interactions with my customers reminded me where my bread and butter came from. *They* were the business. Keeping them satisfied was the mission.

A few years later I was hired by a company in Seattle. The week before I was supposed to start, I went down to meet the guys I’d be working with. Their shop had a completely different vibe. And that was because the techs were completely isolated from the customers. They didn’t take phone calls, they didn’t offer support, they didn’t even talk to them at the service counter. All they did was fix computers. And that changed everything. Talking with them, I used the word “customer” and the lead tech said, “Let me stop you right there. We don’t call them customers. We call them...” And what he called them isn’t something I can repeat. It was really bad. The next morning I called the general manager there and told him I didn’t want the job. I eventually did get a job with that same company in Portland. Things were run pretty much the same way as that shop in Seattle. Thankfully the attitude was *much* better, but I noticed the problem. When you never meet or deal with the customers, it changes your perspective. The service counter keeps handing you broken computers

and your job is to fix them. And it never stops. And instead of seeing the broken computers as the problem, you start to see the people who broke them as the problem. You can even start to see them as the enemy. And it becomes all about fixing the computers. You lose sight of the real mission, which is to satisfy the customer and to leave them happy and with a good experience. And it’s easy to not notice, because you’re still fixing computers even though you’ve lost the real mission. In the corporate world they have a term for that: employee misalignment. Or when it happens to a whole department or company, it’s “mission drift”. And it can absolutely destroy a business.

Brothers and Sisters, the same thing can and does happen in the church. We lose sight of our mission. We misidentify the enemy. And we fail as stewards of the gospel and of God’s kingdom. If a church does that long enough, if it gets entrenched in the wrong mission, if it misrepresents Jesus and the gospel and the kingdom and refuses to get back on track, Jesus warns that he will take away our lampstand. Remember his letters to the seven churches in Revelation. He’ll let a church dwindle and die. Because a bad witness is worse than no witness at all.

We’re back to St. Paul’s letter to the churches in Ephesus this morning—Chapter 4. [Page 1161 in the pew Bibles.] And Paul gets at something very much like this idea of “mission drift”. First, a little bit of recap: Before Passiontide we made our way through Ephesians 1-3. In the first half of the letter Paul made his way back and forth between prayer and praise to walk us through the story of God and his creation—through the story of Israel and how Israel’s story led everything to the story of Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, and how Jesus has created a new Israel, a new people of God who have been filled and given new life through the Holy Spirit God had promised to his people so long before. In Ephesians 1:10 Paul spelled

out God's plan and promise: to sum up the whole cosmos in the Messiah, everything in heaven and on earth in him. It's a promise of a new temple. Heaven and earth brought together and at the centre of it, at its heart is the image of God. That image was supposed to be us—humanity. God created us to be the stewards of his creation and the priests of his temple. But we rejected that vocation and tried to become gods ourselves. And so Jesus has come to restore that image—to represent it faithfully and perfectly himself and to wash us clean with his blood and to fill us with his Spirit in order to restore us to that lost vocation. So Paul is clear: this promise *has been* fulfilled already in Jesus. It is currently *being* fulfilled in the creation of a renewed humanity. For Paul, the great witness of this new humanity is the church—where Jews and gentiles were being brought together into a single, united people, filled with God's Spirit and living as his temple. And the promise, finally, *will be* fulfilled in the end when, as he puts it, God will do far more abundantly than we can ask or imagine.

So Jesus and the church—this new people, this renewed humanity—are the evidence that God truly is at work to set his broken creation to rights. Through this people, God will reveal his manifold, his multifaceted, his Technicolor wisdom to the world and one day, because of Jesus and the faithful stewardship of his people, the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. Brothers and Sisters, this is why the church's witness is so important. This is why mission drift is so dangerous. This is why, if a church goes astray from the mission and repeatedly and repeatedly refuses God's correction, he will let us wither and die. Because the church is meant to witness his glory to the world and that can't and won't happen unless we are faithful stewards of his gospel and his Spirit, unless we're truly heaven on earth people.

So Paul now begins Chapter 4 writing, "Therefore..." All of that (Chapters 1-3) is what the "therefore" is there for. So knowing God's plan and his promise, knowing that he is setting creation to rights through Jesus and the faithful witness of his church, he says "Therefore, I appeal to you—yes, it's me, the prisoner in the Lord—I appeal to you to walk worthy of the calling to which you've been called. Bear with one another in love; be humble, meek, and patient in every way with one another. Make every effort to guard the unity that the Spirit gives, with your lives bound together in peace."

Paul's going to make three points in verses 1-10 and this is the first. He's got something important coming in 11-16, but first he's got to lay a foundation for it. Think of it in terms of him building a sturdy three-legged stool to support it. So, first, here in verses 1-3 he stresses the need for humility. He starts out stressing that it's essential for the church to live in a way that matches the gospel—the good news about Jesus. "Walk worthy of the calling to which you've been called." Into the middle of this Paul interjects a reminder of his imprisonment. They already knew he was in prison. That's why he's writing them a letter instead of talking to them in person. But Paul reminds them again at this point because he saw his imprisonment as an example of what it means to walk worthy of our gospel calling. Brothers and Sisters, the ways of God's kingdom are the inverse of the ways of the world. To the pagans in Ephesus, for Paul to be in prison was a sign that either he was out of favour with his God or that his God was powerless to help him. But for Paul, who had made the cross and the humility of Jesus the lens through which he looked at everything, to be in prison for the sake of the gospel was a sign of faithfulness. In the same way, the gospel virtues that he says should characterise the life of the church—the ones he lists in verse 2: loving each

other, being humble, meek, and patient—those weren't virtues at all in the world of the Greeks and Romans. To the pagans, they were signs of weakness.

So Paul stresses that they've been *called*. Usually Paul uses this word, this idea of "calling" to emphasise God's initiative in our coming to faith, but here he kind of wrapping everything to do with—call it "conversion"—he's rolling it all into this idea of calling: We've heard the gospel, we've received and taken to heart the gospel, we're repented, and in faith we've obeyed the gospel. Now he reminds us just what it was we responded to when God called us. This is the part I think we sometimes forget, but Paul wants us to remember that the gospel—the good news about Jesus and the message that once captivated us—is about God's amazing *kindness* and *generosity* and *grace*. And Paul's point is that if that's the gospel that called us, then our gospel life ought to be equally characterised by kindness, generosity, and grace.

When I hear that I think, "Oh yeah! Duh. How could I lose sight of that?" But we do. I don't think we ever forget it; it's more that it sort of slips into the background. But when we let that happen—think of our Philippians 2 Epistle from Palm Sunday—when we let this slip into the background, we lose the mind of the Messiah that Paul is so insistent we should share. We stop acting with humility and we start acting and living according to the values of the world around us. Instead of living for others, we start using and abusing others for ourselves. Instead of putting others before ourselves, we act out of pride and selfishness. Instead of being gracious, we can become jerks. To people out there. But to our brothers and sisters in the church, too. And when we do that, we stop working and living as the body of Jesus, our unity starts to break down, and our light grows dim. We undermine our witness to God's new

creation. So Paul reminds us: bear with each other in love, with humility, meekness, and patience—*because this is the way of the cross!*

The Greek word Paul uses for “patience,” it literally means “great-heartedness”. Brothers and Sisters, consider the great-heartedness of Jesus who died for his enemies. We ought to have that kind of great-heartedness for each other. It doesn’t happen naturally, but this is why God has plunged us into his Spirit—or maybe I should say, he’s plunged his Spirit into us: to fill our hearts with love for him and for each other. We come to the church from different backgrounds, we all have our likes and our dislikes and our preferences, we have our different personalities, we all have our hurts and traumas, and it’s really easy to get bent out of shape or bend others out of shape when things don’t go right. It’s really easy to want to force our desires on others. It’s really easy to use others to accomplish our own goals. It’s really easy to become divided. Paul knew that as well as anyone and so he tells us, “No! That’s not your calling. Your calling is to be a loving, generous, and gracious gospel people who share the mind of the Messiah and overflow with the love and life of God’s Spirit.

And, like I said, things like humility, meekness, and patience were not virtues in their world. This is why Israel stood out from the peoples around them. The scriptures taught them over and over the importance of humility and love, meekness and patience. The pagans didn’t think that way and even Israel struggled and often failed to be this kind of people. And this is why it’s so important for the church—for us—to remember our calling: because our renewal through Jesus and the Spirit to this kind of life is the fulfilment of the scriptures—of God’s promises. Our gospel life is a witness to God’s glory and one that confronts this broken world with what true humanity is supposed to be. This is how the church announces the

coming of God’s new creation. This is what it means to *be* the people who pray “on earth as in heaven” and not just the people who hope for it and pray for it, but most importantly the people who *do* it.

Instead, we’re too often like James and John (remember that scene in Mark’s Gospel) conniving a way to sit at the right hand of Jesus. And Jesus reminds us: That’s how the pagans do things. They push and shove and boss and bully their way through life, always trying to get to the top, but the son of man came to give his life as a ransom for many. Brothers and Sisters, keep the generous humility of Jesus always in your sight. That’s the kind of people, the kind of community the church should be. In fact, Paul writes in verse 3: the Spirit has given us unity and made us one and we need to guard that unity with our lives. That means, first, that each of us ought to live for the sake of our brothers and sisters and not for ourselves. If we would do that, we’d have no reason to be offended by each other and to divide. But, too, to live for the sake of each other is to be willing and quick to forgive instead of taking offense when things do happen. And, again, this runs totally against the grain of our culture. Our culture says to look out for ourselves; it says to get even; or it says, at least, to cut those problem people from our lives. The church is meant to witness a better way of being human—one that shows the world (again) the love, generosity, and patience of the cross.

So that’s the first leg of our stool. Now look at verses 4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit; you were, after all, called to one hope which goes with your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.”

I can’t help but think that Paul has the *shema* in mind. Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” That was sort of Israel’s

fundamental creed. It’s why God could not be represented by idols and it’s why there was only to be one temple in Israel. And now Paul extrapolates that out in light of Jesus and the new covenant. One body, one Spirit, one hope; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and above all, there’s one God. We’re so distant from the polytheistic world of Paul and the Ephesians that we might not realise what Paul’s doing here, but this is him again highlighting how the church confronts the world with the reality of God and his new creation. Hear, O Church, the Lord our God, the Lord is one...and that oneness works its way through who we are and what we do. And it not only makes the church stand out in a world chock full of gods as in Paul’s day, but it also makes the church stand out in a world that is divided by philosophies and religions and all the “isms” we can think of. And that includes all the “isms” that divide the church: Anglicanism, Lutheranism, Catholicism, Presbyterianism, Methodism, Pentecostalism and on and on. You and I won’t fix all those divisions, but we ought to do all we can in our life as the church to live out the reality that we share one faith in the one Lord, that we’ve all been baptised into the one triune God, filled with the one Spirit, and live with the one hope of a world set to rights, and that we are one body despite what the signs outside our churches might imply.

When it becomes more about our “brand” than it does about our one God, our one Lord, our one faith, our one baptism, and our one hope; when we start thinking of Brothers and Sisters in the Lord as enemies—we’ve lost the plot. Ecclesiastical employee misalignment. Ecclesiastical mission drift. We need to recentre ourselves on Jesus. We probably *really* need to remember his humility, because we’ve probably become more than little ecclesiastically or theologically snobbish. And we need to remember that God intends to make his glory known to the world through his church

regardless of our “isms” and those things won’t matter when the mission is accomplished and he is above all, through all, and in all—that glorious image of a temple filled with his presence.

And then then the third leg. Look at verses 7-10: “But grace was given to each one of us, according to the measure the Messiah used when he was distributing gifts. That’s why it says [and here Paul quotes Psalm 68:18], ‘When he went up on high, he led bondage itself into bondage, and he gave gifts to men.’ When it says that ‘he went up,’ what this means is that he also came down into the lower places, that is, to earth. The one who came down is the one who also ‘went up’, yes, above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.”

What Paul’s working towards is an explanation of God’s gifts to the church—all of us having a vast diversity of gifts to be used together for the common good. We’ll get to that next Sunday. But before he can get to the diversity of gifts, Paul wants to stress the fact that the gift of the gifts themselves is yet another thing that stresses our unity. Because those gifts, if we run with them on our own can turn into a source of division. So Paul quotes from Psalm 68, which is about God’s enthronement on Mt. Zion, but it’s also got echoes of Moses going up Mt. Sinai. The gist of it is God enthroned on high and lavishing gifts on this people—whether that’s his abundance on the nation Israel or sending down Moses with his law carved on stone tablets. Paul knew this Psalm well, but after he met the risen Jesus, it took on another layer: It’s now the Messiah who ascended to his throne and in doing that he has led bondage itself into bondage. The long captivity of humanity to sin and death is over. Jesus has triumphed and been exalted. It follows Paul’s prayer in Chapter 1 where he praises God for putting all things in subjection under his feet. So Jesus’ enthronement after defeating our enemies has inaugurated

a new age. And that prompts Paul to tweak the words of the Psalm. Instead of humans bringing gifts to God as they did under the old covenant, God now pours out his gifts of grace and redeemed humans receive them. Through that grace and through those gifts, God is setting his people to rights so that they—so that we, his people, his church—can begin to live his new creation here and now. So, first, the gospel not only restores us to our God-given vocation, it also gives each of us a new sub-vocation to help the church fulfil that task.

Second, Paul, I think, stresses that this is part of the gift of God’s Spirit. Jesus has ascended and in doing so the Spirit has “come down”. This is again about God’s new temple. Jesus washes us clean and makes a fit dwelling place for God, and God then sends down his Spirit to indwell us—as Paul put it in 3:19 when he talked about the church being filled with all God’s fullness. And in this Paul reminds us of the mission: Again, God’s purpose is to set creation to rights by filling it with the knowledge of his glory as the waters cover the sea. The church is his means of doing that. We’re not only the people entrusted with the good news of Jesus, crucified and risen; we’re not only a people entrusted to proclaim the goodness and faithfulness, the lovingkindness and generosity of God; we’re also a people filled with his presence and made stewards of his new creation, enabled to live it out—even if imperfectly—in the midst of the old. A people **called** both to proclaim the good news that Jesus is Lord and that he has died and risen to deliver us from sin and death, but also a people called, gifted, equipped, indwelt by God himself, in order to make known his love, generosity, and patience and to display as a community the very renewal, the very filling of all things that is our hope and towards which his plan and his promise are moving.

And this—I’ll just say in closing—this is why the Bible’s image of the temple is so important. It not only reminds us who we are; it reminds us of the mission. The temple is the place of God’s presence. It’s the place where people go to find, to meet, to know, to experience the God of creation. And too often we think of it as something *out there*, but Brothers and Sisters, the temple *is us*. Washed clean by the blood of Jesus and filled with God’s Spirit, we are the temple. And that means that the world ought to see the God of the incarnation, the God of the cross, the God who humbles and gives himself for the sake of his enemies, the world ought to meet that God in us. We can become consumed by so many other good things, so many other things that, yes, as the church we should be doing. But we lose sight of the real mission, of our real calling to be God’s temple, to make his glory known to the ends of the earth. Brothers and Sisters, the world ought to be drawn to God, to this temple, as it sees in us a better way to be human, as it sees the beginning of God’s new creation in our life together: humanity’s divisions and strifes healed here. Humanity’s tears wiped away, here. As it finds hope here. The grace and love, the meekness and the patience of Jesus the Messiah on display here. As it sees the glory of God in the work of redemption taking place in us.

Let’s pray: Almighty Father, you gave your only Son to die for our sins and to rise again for our justification: Grant that we may put away the leaven of the old age, and put on the life of the new that we might make your glory known in all the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*