

October 29, 2006

“CPC – Growing in Community”
Ephesians 4:1-16

FCF: Lack of connection one to another

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Having been called into God’s work of renewal,
(magnet) we are to walk in a manner worthy of that calling – in community.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“*I believe in a holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,*” reads the Apostles’ Creed. God’s people universal and united knowing no boundaries or barriers. Yet it doesn’t take too long a time in the church to learn how fractured and divided she can be. There is so often a disconnect between what is said and what we see. And more, worse, between what we long for and what seems possible. Is there any hope for us?

This message is intended to show the theological grounding for the fourth clause in our church’s Vision Statement – “growing in community.” Listen to the Word of God.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ephesians 4:1-16

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Great promises often leave us not only with anticipation but questions as well. “*How will this be?*” we ask. Case in point, I was recently given an electronic gadget that promises to give wonderful flexibility in communication, taking notes, making appointments, etc. It’s quite something. So is the manual. The “Getting Started” booklet is 14 pages. The “User’s Guide” 134. I think it weighs more than the gadget itself.

Great promises often leave us not only with anticipation but questions as well. We see something of that in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. The promise is a new creation. Paul writes of all things united in Christ by uniting His church and breaking down all that separates us from God and one another. That’s chapters 1 through 3.

Chapters 4 through 6 then begin with a key word, “*therefore.*” There is a connection between what he has said and what he is about to say. In view of the one, we need to hear the other. Paul is, in essence, saying, “*In view of all that God has done, this then is how you should respond.*” The imperative coming only after the indicative. But there’s more. Paul is also saying, “*In view of all that God has promised to do, this is how He plans to bring it about.*” The explanation of the means coming then after the statement of the goal. What is coming followed by how it is coming. “*Paul, the scope of this is amazing. How can it be?*” “*I’m glad you asked. Sit down. And pay attention.*” Having been promised and called into the Lord’s work of renewal – making all things one in Him – we are to “*walk in a manner worthy of that calling.*” How? In community.

What does this community look like? How then are we to live? Good questions.

I. WE ARE ONE

To get at them, we begin with this. As we think about this new community, Paul calls us to this simple fact – that we are one (**READ Ephesians 4:1-3**). We are one.

A) Living as One

We are one in Christ. And so we are urged then to live accordingly.

1. Attitudes of the heart

What does that mean? “*With all humility and gentleness*” – seeing God’s omniscience, omnipotence, and holiness and seeing ourselves as small and sinful. It begins there.

2. Interactions with one another

These attitudes of the heart then shaping our interactions with others – “*patience and forbearance.*” Enduring the shortcomings of others. Forgiving as we have been forgiven.

3. The aim of our lives

A new heart, new relationships, and a new chief aim – “*maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” A unity created by the Holy Spirit we are to treasure and maintain.

B) *Reflecting Our Triune God*

We are to recognize we are one and to live as such. That is what we are to do. Why? Because the church is a reflection of the Triune God (READ Ephesians 4:4-6).

1. One Spirit

There is but one Spirit to the body of which we’ve been made a part. Our bodies have but a single soul. This body has but a single Spirit. We have but one life, one Spirit.

2. One Lord

There is but one Lord whom we serve. We are fellow slaves. We have but one Master.

3. One Father

And there is but one Father. We are of one family. We have but one lineage.

Illustration:

And we are to live that way. Picture it like this. The Smiths have three sons – Tom, Dick, and Harry. The years go by. The family falls apart. The couple separates. The sons begin to feud. They drift apart and lose contact. Now what is the great need these people have? Not to become something new but to be what they are – a family.

That’s what Paul is telling us. Recognize who you are and be what you are – one.

Application:

Recognizing the source of this unity, there is no place for complacency. Sins against this unity are sins against the Triune God. Slander – speaking lies of one another. Gossip – speaking to others with no need to know. Selfishness – insisting on our own way. Stinginess with what we claim as our own whether in money or time. None of this has any place now because we have been made one. All are an affront to Him. The Lord has begun this great work of renewal, making us one, and we are to live as a community.

II. WE ARE DIFFERENT

We are one. Yet at the same time, Paul says we are different (READ Ephesians 4:7-10). We are one but enriched by our diversity, diverse but held together by our unity.

A) *Embracing Our Diversity*

What then does this mean? We are to embrace this diversity, the many gifts.

1. The nature of what has been given

Recognizing the nature of what has been given – gifts not deserved, gifts given out of grace, gifts needed for us to serve. None of us more or less deserving – all of grace.

2. To whom it has been given

To whom are they given? “*To each one of us*” – none excluded, all included. Given not for ourselves but for the good of all. Thus, they have been given to each yet for all.

3. How it has been given

How have they been given? Who is behind their allotment? They are given by the authority of Christ. As the quote from Psalm 68 alludes to, Christ is the conquering king giving gifts to His people. He gives with authority. And with purpose – He measured.

B) *Accepting His Gifts*

And so He calls us to embrace this diversity within the body and to accept the gifts He has given – all the gifts, some of whom are people (READ Ephesians 4:11-12).

1. What Christ has given

The gifts here are people. Clearly some of these were temporary, roles that passed with the closing of the canon. But others are permanent, still with us now. Still with us now.

2. Why He has given

Why were they given? To prepare, to “*equip*” the saints. Towards what end? That they might serve. Now who is Paul speaking of? What is the division of labor? “*The work of the ministry*” is not done by the pastors. It done by the laity, the saints, who the pastors have prepared and equipped. All of which is done with an ultimate goal – “*the building up of the body of Christ*” – growing not only in numbers but in maturity and depth.

Illustration:

The key here is something akin to what I tell my young charges on the soccer field – “play your position.” Play your position. Don’t go massing around the ball like some frantic little herd. Play as a team. Play as one. The happiest moments of my time coaching have not been when we won. They have been when my players have played together, as one, as a team. Be glad you’re on the team. Be glad for your teammate’s skills. Be glad for your own skills. Bring joy to your coach. And play your position.

Application:

What we see here speaks to our elders and deacons. Not that they should go around saying, “*Hey, I’m God’s gift to the church.*” But they are. We need them. Our Lord, in His grace, has blessed each of us individually and as a body by providing them.

What we see here speaks to why we have “ministry teams” – gifted folks within the church with a passion for a particular area, working together with others under the oversight of the leaders of the church. God has given us gifts that are to be utilized.

What we see here speaks against “professionalism” in the church. There is no room for pride in pastors thinking they can or should do all the work. Nor is there room for laziness in the laity. Yes, we all have different roles. But listen! It’s all hands on deck. We’ve been called to something great, to be a part of the Lord’s work of renewal. And to walk in a manner worthy of that means to do so in community with one another.

III. WE ARE HIS

We are one. We are different. And we are also His (**READ Ephesians 4:13-16**).

A) He Is Our Measure

We are His. He is our measure – the One towards whom we strive.

1. Unity

Paul sets our eyes here on unity – unity both in “*the faith*” of the Son of God and in “*the knowledge*” of Him as well. One day we will all trust and know Him as we should.

2. Maturity

Paul sets our eyes here on maturity – the day we will be finally and fully developed.

3. Stability

And Paul sets our eyes here on stability – no longer given to childish individualism that splits us apart or foolish teaching that leads us astray.

Paul sets our eyes on each of these things not to cause us to dreamily wish for things to come but to know and to long and to strive for them even now as we wait.

Illustration:

It’s quite a vision. It reminds me of a speech given to Congress by President Kennedy in the early 1960’s. He said (**READ [Moon Shot](#), p.133**):

I believe this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth. No single space project in this period

will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space, and, none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.

This was a tremendous challenge. Many within NASA weren't sure if they could pull it off. Even some of the Mercury Seven had their doubts. This was huge.

B) *He Is Our Strength*

Well, so too is what Paul is speaking of here – unattainable in our own strength.

1. Means of growth

So he speaks of Christ as our strength, our model, His ways as the means of our attaining this unity, maturity, and stability – “*speaking the truth in love*” we will grow into Him.

2. Source of growth

But even more than the means of our growth, our Lord is the source of our growth as well. All activity in this body comes from Him, flows through Him, is enabled by Him.

Application:

This is what we've been called to. Again, there is a work of renewal which our Lord has begun and will surely bring to fruition where all things will be made one in Him. This is what is coming. And He calls us to both respond to that news and to join with what He's doing as He will surely work through us as we respond to Him.

CONCLUSION:

Stephen Ambrose in his book, [Comrades](#), writes of a relationship between three WWII veterans that stirs this vision within me. They had a great deal in common – each veterans of D-Day. Yet there was a great deal that set them apart. John Howard was with the British forces and Dick Winters was with the Americans. Hans von Luck was with the Germans. There was a time when Howard and Winters would have killed von Luck if given a chance – and vice versa. Each lost friends at the hands of the other. But these men had an admiration and respect for one another that defies our understanding. Ambrose relays an incident that bears this out ([READ Comrades, pp.124-125](#)):

Each year they would put on their show (relaying stories and insights) for my WWII class...One time a student, shaking with indignation, demanded to know how Hans could have fought for Hitler. When Hans protested that he had been a regular army officer since 1927, and never a Nazi or SS, the student began reciting the crimes of the German army. He pointed his finger at Hans, nearly shouting, saying Hans must have known about this or that atrocity, almost hinting that Hans must have been involved...John Howard stepped in. He spoke directly to the student, telling him he had no idea what he was talking about, that Hans was an honorable man and it was absurd to accuse him of criminal activity. He said those of us lucky enough to live in the democracies do not have the right to cast stones at those who were unlucky enough to be caught in a Nazi nation. Dick Winters was there. He, too, spoke up in Hans's defense and lectured the student on what he didn't know about the war...What a scene this is, here were two of the best company commanders in the Allied force, with elite companies, one British gliderborne and the other American airborne, rising to defend the good name of a high-ranking German officer in front of an audience of American students.

I've thought a great deal about that story. And it stirs my heart.

It gives me hope. It gives me confidence. Ambrose says nothing about any of these men being Christians. Nothing at all. And so it strikes me that if such community can exist between such men with such a past and yet who have no more power in their lives than they did, how much more can and should such community take place here?

How this should encourage us as to what is coming! And embolden in what we should be doing! Our Lord has begun the renewal of all things and has called us to participate in that, to be signposts of what is coming – to live in community, as one.

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(magnet) we are to walk in a manner worthy of that calling – in community.