

When I prepare a sermon, in my mind's eye I look around and I see you. I see you sitting where you usually sit, I think about what you bring with you here, the hopes, and struggles and sins. One week in my heart is one who sits over here, another week one who sits in the back. Sometimes in my mind as I write is one who has recently suffered illness or loss, or one who is troubled by others in this community of faith, or is troubling them. At times the people I write the sermon to are not present that day. I am disappointed for I expect God to shape and mould and transform you by God's word. I hope all of you expect the same.

Especially this morning. For our second lesson is a word from God to each and every one of us at this moment, a word to be tasted and chewed and swallowed and digested. I do not have a lot to add this morning to the word from scripture that we will hear. But I hope that each of you will add your full attention, for the almighty God is stooping down to this place at this moment to speak to you.

Paul writes, I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you were called.

You were called by God in holy baptism to live the life of a Christian. This is a calling from which there is no vacation, no time off, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ all of your existence has been claimed by God, forever. You are called a child of God, a sister, a brother of JESUS CHRIST. A holy one, a saint. The almighty God creator of all things, calls you all of these. You are honored.

Now, live a life worthy of that honor, worthy of the name Christian.

Paul continues: live with all humility and gentleness, with patience. This is the clothing with which God clothes you. Humility, Gentleness, patience. You are dressed just as Christ is dressed as you wear these wherever you go. Especially at work, especially at home. You cannot weave

these garments for yourself, yet God will dress you in them as you trust in Christ, hear his word, believe his word. Though humility and gentleness and patience ^{See} ~~be~~ an impossibility for you, all things are possible for God, pray, trust. Wait.

I therefore, a 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.

These last words are about our life in this Christian community. Listen to the words, bearing with one another, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit.

Being a Christian has never been easy. These words were first written nearly two thousand years ago yet even then Christians were a burden to one another. Some in this church of ^{Jesus Christ} ~~God~~ you like, you enjoy, but others are a trial. You are liked and appreciated by some, others ^{might} ~~would~~ be pleased if you would just leave. Bearing with one another, making every effort are part of our calling. The better we know one another, the more we need to bear, the more effort we need to give. Why should we try? Paul tells us:

There is one body, and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

There is not a different spirit in you than the spirit that is in your neighbor, not a different Christ, not a different God the Father. One spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of us all. We bear with one another, we make every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit because the very same Christ is in you and in your neighbor.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

One Spirit of one Lord Jesus Christ is in us, but we are not the same.
God has decided to give us differing gifts so that God can accomplish what God wants.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

The gifts that you are given by God are given not for your glory, but that the body of Christ might be built up.

We are not talking numbers here. The body of Christ being built up is not about budgets and attendance and growth in membership, but is about love. Service. True worship and devotion to God.

Paul says it is about all of us coming to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.

The time is past for us to just go this way and that, now is the time to know what we believe and in whom we believe and to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called. These days in which we are living are demanding that we be centered in Christ. Otherwise we will be blown away. Being centered in Christ means commitment to worship, to Bible reading and study, to serving in and beyond the church. Maybe once we could live as halfway Christians, but that time is no longer. Now we are called to maturity.

Paul writes, "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, ~~joined and knit~~ together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Speaking the truth in love. Christians are called to speak the truth. But in love. Often I don't like the truth about me. I don't want to hear it. I am angered when I hear it. But when people who love me speak the truth to me, I am able to grow.

We are a community that in love must learn to speak the truth to one another. Everything is not just fine with me and with you. If God is going to build up this body of Christ some things must change. We must all learn ~~more and more~~ to think not only of me, my needs, my worship, my feelings, but ~~wanted to think~~ of Christ who has invited that very person who so irritates me to ^{share} ~~share~~ God's feast with me. Our brothers and sisters know what we do to injure this body of Christ. ~~Each and every one of us~~ ^{We can} ~~not~~ listen and change. For where the truth is spoken in love, it is no longer my neighbor who speaks to me but God.

I beg you, therefore, to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with aptience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all.