

## "One"

Proper 13B, 2 August 2009

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

Ephesians 4:1-16

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. 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. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

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, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the 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 about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 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.

Prayer.

Last Sunday

From Paul's letter to the Ephesians

We heard the Apostle praying for his people

The church he helped establish.

It was a heartfelt prayer that is a natural lead-in to our passage for this morning.

Paul is praying for,

Is yearning for unity,

Oneness for his people.

Beg is not too strong of a word,

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg you

to lead a life ....

With all humility and gentleness,

With patience,

Bearing with one another in love,

Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit

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In the bond of peace."  
The first characteristic of Christian unity  
Is humility, gentleness, patience, and love.  
To say these four things  
Leads us immediately to consider the degree which we fall short:  
The time we boasted of ourselves,  
The occasion we had to act decisively,  
The last time we lost our patience,  
When we acted out of spite, anger, or revenge.  
We think, "my, if this is what unites us, I'm not good enough to be in."  
These ideals are not expected immediately upon conversion.  
Rather, these are the goals towards which we grow,  
The ideals by which we become unified by the Spirit.  
John Wesley would say  
"this is the perfection towards which we strive."

There is one hope of your call,  
The Apostle teaches us;  
One Body,  
One Spirit,  
One Lord,  
One faith,  
One baptism,  
One God and Father of us all.  
The hope of our call is to live life worthy of being a disciple of Jesus Christ,  
The humility, gentleness, patience, and love I mentioned,  
Growing, always maturing into the one Body of Christ.  
We are,  
And still seek to become,  
The one Body of Christ.  
There is a time of adolescent awkwardness  
When one is,  
Yet still has yet to become;  
When physical growth outpaces the development of coordination  
That serves as a good metaphor for growing into the Body of Christ.  
"We must no longer be children,"  
the Apostle tells us,  
"Tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind ..."  
Oh, yes, we want to be a child again,  
Fresh from our conversion experience  
When we were born again of the Spirit.  
So many of us have such passionate longings to stay the infant  
That we never mature beyond infancy.  
We never grow beyond conversion

And remain nothing more than spiritual potential.  
Likewise many communities of faith never want to grow old,  
They want to bottle the evangelistic enthusiasm that caused them to split away from the old  
main line ethos.  
Be careful fighting the establishment,  
Because one day you'll wake up and discover you've become the establishment.  
But Paul is calling us to develop and grow,  
To move beyond infancy and childhood,  
To stand up and become the hope that Christ has called us to be.

Clearly,  
One Body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God the Father of us all  
Is the central, core doctrine around which  
***we ARE called to uniformity.***

This is what makes us so uncomfortable with Mormons, and Unitarians, and Universalists.  
There is just no wiggle room to this core orthodoxy  
That reaches back to the first century church.  
As much as we would like to be friendly and tolerant,  
We are not united with those who have been blow about by  
"every wind of doctrine,  
by people's trickery,  
by their craftiness in deceitful scheming,"  
As Paul so eloquently states.  
For the Apostle,  
He was speaking about one of the most urgent crisis of the early church:  
The debate about what unites the new Christian  
From a Jewish background with  
The new Christian from a Gentile background.  
It isn't circumcision.  
It isn't conformity to dietary laws.  
It isn't even according to birthright – who is one of Abraham's descendants, and who isn't.  
What unites us is Jesus Christ.  
Period.  
Being the Body of Christ,  
While still growing into the Body of Christ.

We are one  
Because Paul rightly observes  
That each of us, though different,  
Have received gifts given to us by Christ when he ascended.  
Gifts and grace are much the same word in the Greek and they are often translated  
interchangeably.  
Each of us have been given gifts and grace,  
"That some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers."

We may like Paul's list of unifying gifts from I Corinthians 12 much better than what is mentioned here:

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good;" (1 Corinthians 12:7)  
The utterance of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment, and tongues.

What is mentioned in our list from Ephesians sounds much more exclusive  
Like gifts are only given to leaders, not to everyone.

"I'm not ever going to be an apostle, prophet, evangelist, preacher or teacher," we may complain.

But, I would suggest that it is possible to also read it this way:  
good leaders are necessary for the church's unity.

Leaders build up the Body of Christ.

Leaders keep the faith tightly bound

And keep us from straying by every blowing of the wind.

Also, are we not all teachers?

Maybe not Sunday school teachers,

But don't we teach by example?

Don't we lead by modeling Christ-like behavior?

Today,

As we approach this Eucharistic table,

Do not think about all that divides us:

Conservative or liberal, social justice or fundamentalism, Catholic or Protestant, clergy or laity, homosexuality, or abortion.

Rather, focus on the one thing that unites us,

That makes us one,

Ever growing,

Ever developing,

Always becoming

Yet already am;

We are the One Body of Christ.

One Body,

One Lord,

One Baptism,

One Faith.

Dearly beloved,

Let us partake of one loaf, and drink of one cup,

As a sign and symbol that we are one.

Amen.

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