

"Humble, Gentle, Patient, Eager – and Persistent"

Text: Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

May the undeserved love of God be multiplied to you, and may you have peace and comfort in the sure knowledge that Jesus has indeed died for your sins, and that he has thereby secured forgiveness for you and for all mankind. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

You and I have someplace to be, and it's not here. It's here, but it's not here. Right now we are on a path to somewhere else. Yet if we don't focus on where we are right now, we will never get to where it is we want to be – where we *need to be*.

Any of this making sense to you? As a Christian, in a strange sort of way it ought to, since it's a description of the life of every single Christian that has ever or will ever be born.

Life for a child of God is a never-ending struggle to be content, but never to settle; to acknowledge reality, but never to accept the sinful way things are; to excel, but to do so by putting everyone else first. It is a constant struggle to be all that you can be, but always so that others can be more and greater than you are now.

Confused yet? For help in understanding this strange and wonderful walk of the child of God we turn to the Word and wisdom of our God. That part of God's Word that will instruct us this morning is found in the 4th Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians:

ESV **Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16** *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. 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. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift... ¹¹ And he gave 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, ¹³ until we all 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, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, 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.

So far the holy words and wisdom of our God. How blessed and privileged we are to have the very words of God as our perfect guide through life – our certain source of clarity in a world of great confusion and uncertainty. God grant to each of us the gifts he would like to give us this morning through the study of these words. To that end we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

Fellow servants of Christ Jesus, the introduction made Christianity sound impossibly complex. It is and it isn't. (Not helping much, am I?) The point here is also the problem: Christianity will always be a struggle, but Christians in general seem to be giving up the struggle to do or be anything more than mediocre – to just get by and to expend as little time and effort as possible in the process. So many seem to have abandoned the pursuit of Christian excellence in favor of a sort of apathetic, fatalistic indifference.

That sort of mindset or attitude is certainly a far cry from what the Holy Spirit is promoting in this morning's text, isn't it? Listen again to the goal that the Holy Spirit through the pen of the Apostle Paul laid out for us in our text, where he told us about God's will that we all **"walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you were called,"** and that we **"all 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."**

That doesn't sound anything like apathy, indifference, or mediocrity. It sounds like the Holy Spirit is promoting pure excellence in every single one of his children. No slackers, no excuses, no exceptions.

We know it to be true that everyone here is included, in part, because we here also find the Holy Spirit's declaration that **"grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."** That statement is even more amazing when you realize that it is

preceded by these remarkable words: **"God (the) Father of all... is above all, and through all, and in all."** Have you ever met someone with charisma; someone who just seems to light up a room upon entering? How much more with God. It is simply not possible for any place where God himself dwells to be considered ordinary or common – to be anything other than absolutely magnificent and regal. God immeasurably elevates every place where he resides.

With that information as background, now consider again the fact that our text assures every single child of God that he is living within you. Incredible.

So what does this mean, in practical terms, for each one of us here this morning? For starters, it ought to make every single one of us feel pretty special. Beyond that, the answer is not left to our imagination. It is spelled out precisely in the opening verse of our text: **"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."** To put it another way, our God is here encouraging us to walk and live in keeping with who and what we really are.

Some might imagine that our text doesn't include everyone, since it mentions those who work in the public ministry. Who here, besides the pastor, has been "called"? Every single one of you – a fact that is also clearly taught in this text. There is a tendency for laymen to read this verse in our text: **"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers..."** and to assume that the Holy Spirit's words here apply only to those serving in the public ministry. That most certainly was not God's intention. If it were, he would never have continued that sentence with these words: **"... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."** The calling and work of public servants has as its goal the preparation of God's people for **"the work of ministry."**

Note this well. All serve, but all perform different, vital functions. Called servants train lay members – who in turn are thereby both qualified and commissioned by their God to carry out the work of ministry, which is simply to **"Go and make disciples of all the nations."** Listen again to how our God in this morning's text described the goal: **"Rather, 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."**

Pause for just a moment here and take the time to re-read and contemplate especially the underlined words above: **"...when each part is working properly."** Another translation puts it this way: **"...by which every part does its share..."** This represents more than just a statement of God's will (which certainly in itself makes this priceless information). This also is a statement of God's formula for success in this or any other generation – a statement of how he expects this and every other Christian congregation to operate. The Great Commission is not just the pastor's job and calling; it is the privilege of God's Church, which means every single individual member of God's Church. That means that no matter who you are, no matter what your status or occupation, God's Great Commission is *your* calling, *your* mission, *your* purpose in life.

So how then do you and I carry out that shared privilege or calling? How do we carry out what our text referred to as **"each part working properly"** or **"every part doing its share"**?

Again our text answers, but with words so profoundly simple that they can easily fly under the radar of our notice or contemplation: **"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."**

One of the first things that jumps out at us here is the fact that Paul cannot even talk about **"speaking the truth in love"** without also mentioning Christ in the same sentence. There's obviously a good reason for that: *there really is no "truth" without Jesus Christ.*

The godless cynics, of course, would probably explode if they heard us say something like that. They would argue that 2+2 would still equal 4 even if someone did not believe in Jesus Christ. They would argue that the laws of physics and science still hold true even if you don't believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior. Our response, of course, would be that it is God himself that created those laws of math and science, and, more than that, in the absence of Christ, none of it really matters. In fact what good is the sum total of all the world's accumulated knowledge in the absence of Jesus Christ? Such information will not save a single soul on the Day of Judgment; faith alone in Jesus Christ will.

It's clear then that our Triune God wants us to be more than we are right now. Two questions remain: First, how do we even create or obtain the *desire* to grow and to become more than we are right now.

Second, once we have the desire, where do we go from there?

The answer to the first (How do we learn to even *want* to be more?) is that that desire has to come from God himself – as is the case with all such holy desires. Pray then that God the Holy Spirit would create in your heart the will, the desire, to be a better Christian. Ask him – beg him daily – to teach you to be more like what he wants you to be. Know also that this is not an impossible dream or goal. Our God has repeatedly invited us to bring our requests to him and promised that he will grant every petition that will not harm us. Ask, and we will receive.

And then here finally is where the sermon title comes in. Ask the Holy Spirit specifically for the gifts of *humility, gentleness, patience, and eagerness* – and *persistence*. Except for *persistence* (which is clearly implied) these are the gifts or attributes specifically listed in our text. Receive these gifts and we will also have our answer to our second question: "*Even if we have the desire, where do we go from there?*"

The world imagines that progress is accomplished through force – the stronger and more persuasive individuals imposing their will upon their subordinates. Today's political rancor and gridlock ought to be enough to put the lie to that notion. So also with Christianity, no one can be forced to believe or to accept anything they don't want to. The more you force, the more society resists. Try to legislate morality and you will only succeed in multiplying sin and making the problem that much worse. Jesus didn't push, he drew. Peter and Paul didn't convert the masses through their clever arguments; they *humbly, gently, patiently, eagerly and persistently* brought God's Word into the lives of those around them. They trusted that that Word alone could accomplish anything good or positive, and God's Word never disappointed them. It never could.

That part of God's Word, that message your friends, family, and coworkers needs to hear is of course first of all that sin is sin. But the next thing they need to hear is not "*You have to...*" but "*Jesus did.*" We've been given the greatest job in the world – to tell hurting souls the best possible news that all that needed to be done for them to enter heaven has already been done. Trusting alone in Jesus Christ, their path is straight and the door is open. That "right message" - combined with "humility, gentleness, patience, eagerness and persistence" - is exactly how real change occurs and real progress is made, one soul at a time.

God grant us all such priceless gifts, along with the desire to use them in his service and to his glory. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Exodus 16:2-6, 12-15** And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." ⁴ ¶ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel... "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him--what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD." ¹³ ¶ In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

^{ESV} **John 6:24-35** So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵ ¶ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." ³⁵ ¶ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

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The 11th Sunday after Pentecost – August 5, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 459 *(Red Hymnal)*

"Come, My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The Old Testament Lesson: (Exodus 16:2-6,12-15) Nothing seems to get man's attention faster than his stomach. Not much else seems to matter when you are hungry. That is, however, in no way a valid excuse or reason to doubt God or to complain about his provision. In our first lesson we hear how the Jews did just that, and how God provided for them.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 100 (Supplement Page 35)

The Gospel Lesson: (John 6:24-35) Our second reading completes the first. Christ is everywhere in the Old Testament if we will but look with the eyes of faith. So also the bread that God sent from heaven, the "manna" as it was called, was itself a type or picture of Christ. Jesus himself says exactly that in this reading. Note also how, as with the people of Moses' day, the people of Jesus' day were concerned first and foremost with the immediate gratification of bodily needs. God grant us the nobler hunger for the needs of our souls – the Bread of Life that is God's Word.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 732 (Stanzas 1-2) *(Brown Hymnal)*

"Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds"

The Sermon – Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

"Humble, Gentle, Patient, Eager – and Persistent"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 732 (Stanzas 3-4) *(Brown Hymnal)*

"Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds"

The Prayers of the Day followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 783 *(Brown Hymnal)*

"Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (31) Ave (41)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 a.m.	– Outreach Committee Meeting
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Hecla
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor David Ude has returned the call to Bethel of Morris, MN. Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer is considering the call to Berea of Inver Grove Heights, MN. Representatives of the CLC met again this past week with representatives of the WELS and ELS in Mankato, MN to further discuss the doctrinal differences that have historically separated our three church bodies. A report of their meetings will be forthcoming.

Study Conference – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend a Study Conference in Hecla tomorrow – leaving early and returning later Monday night.

Outreach Committee – The Outreach Committee is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour this morning. Please come to the meeting if you would like to participate. Given our life's work of "making disciples of all nations," this is certainly something in which we should all take an active interest, whether a member of the Outreach Committee or not. Please see Mr. Pfennig if you have any questions.

Hecla Harvest Festival – The annual Harvest Festival in Hecla is scheduled for Sunday, August 19. Please note that the date was incorrectly reported in the bulletin last Sunday. A 4pm service is planned, with a fellowship meal to follow. See the Pastor for details.

Sunday School Teachers – It is time once again to identify Sunday school teachers for the 2018-2019 school year. Please let Pastor Roehl know if you would be willing and able to serve in that capacity in the coming year.