

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Pentecost 10 – August 2<sup>nd</sup> August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### **Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16**

**<sup>1</sup>As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup>Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

**<sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. .. <sup>11</sup>It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

**<sup>14</sup>Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

Dear children of God,

This morning I want to ask you some questions. Maybe you've thought about these before, but even if you haven't, it might be worthwhile to give them your attention. Why are you here this morning? Why do you belong to this church? Is it necessary to go to church to be a Christian? I'm not asking these questions because I'm disappointed that you're here—I know you had other options! But sometimes I wonder: Can't we still be Christians and spend our Sunday mornings on our porch with a cup of coffee, in the Miller Park parking lot enjoying a relaxing day of tailgating before the Brewers game starts, in your garden, in your boat, or on a golf course?

While I am glad that you chose spending time with God over these other enticing alternatives; I think it's good to remember why we are here. Today I would like to think about:

### **Theme: What Is The Purpose Of Church?**

- 1. So that God's people might grow up in Christ.**
- 2. So that God's people may grow together in Christ.**

Our reading for this morning is from Ephesians Chapter Four. In the first three chapters of the book, Paul speaks strongly about how we are saved only by God's undeserved love—we refer to that as God's grace. You are probably familiar with Ephesians 2:8-9, which says, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”** Paul tells us that God has changed our lives because of this undeserved love in 2:19, **“You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.”**

Because of all that God has done, Paul draws the conclusion in chapter four: This, then, is how you should live. Paul says in verse 1, **“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”** Paul isn't telling us that we can earn heaven by living a worthy life. We aren't called to be in Christ's church because we are worthy. No, Christ calls us into HIS church in spite of our unworthiness—because of that, Paul tells us to respond with an attitude of gratitude.

God wants us to show proper appreciation for his calling into Christ's church. Here's an example of what I mean: Let's say you go out to eat a fancy dinner at your favorite upscale restaurant. While there, you enjoy a great atmosphere, great food, and exceptional service. When you're done, you leave a gratuity (tip) for your server of twenty-five cents. That tip isn't worthy of the great meal you just received. If we tell Jesus, "Thanks for living a perfect life and dying on the cross for me, but I'm still going to live my life however I want," we aren't living a life worthy of the calling we have received.

God tells us one of the purposes of us gathering together is to grow. I think every church in the world wants to grow, but not every church knows the right way to do that. And it can be hard! Many different kinds of people come into church—different backgrounds, different personalities, different ideas. How do all these people grow up in Christ? Drinking coffee together is good. Talking to each other before and after the service is good. Having potlucks and picnics is good. Those things help us get to know each other better. But those things alone don't help us grow up in Christ. Something bigger needs to be done. Many churches believe that if you just downplay your religious differences, the church will grow.

This is called the Ecumenical Movement — as long as you believe in God, and that he is good, and that Jesus is good too, it's ok to put aside the rest of your religious beliefs. As far as the rest of God's Word, we can agree to disagree—that's what the ecumenical movement says. Sometimes we can get caught up in the different projects and programs and lose the divine focus of church also. Today Paul tells us, **"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."** God gave the church leaders to help people grow in their faith. A church does not grow up by agreeing to disagree. And it doesn't come from sharing a cup of coffee either. Christians grow spiritually by learning the Word of God and focusing on the teachings of the Bible.

That's why God's Word is so important in our church. As we read it, hear it and study it together, we will grow in Christ. Paul tells us in verse 14 why it's important to be in God's Word. **"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."** That is how we used to be before God called us. Imagine a young child floating on a little inflatable tube in the middle of Lake Michigan during a storm — being tossed around by the waves, blown all over the place by the winds. Without the strength we receive from studying God's Word, our spiritual lives are the same way: believing one false teaching in one minute, believing another one the next minute. That is why we offer Bible Classes throughout the week and throughout the year.

The study of God's Word brings great blessings. God's Word teaches us how serious our sin is, but he also shows us his plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. As you stay in God's Word, you become mature and you do as Paul says in verse 15, **"speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ."** People who are mature in faith will be better equipped to handle adversity in life. Take David, who wrote Psalm 23. He said, **"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."** We can look at every problem in life with confidence because we know that the Lord is with us. Whether it be financial hardship, sickness, death of a loved one, loss of job; they cannot rob me of my comfort—because the Lord is with us. We become a church full of spiritual grown-ups, when we mature in the truth of God's Word.

## 2. So that God's people may grow together in Christ.

Not only does God want us to grow up in God's Word, he also calls us to grow together. How is it, then, that we can grow together? I think verses 2 and 3 of our reading tell us how: **"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."** The key to growing together is love. When Paul says to "make every effort" it makes it sound as if being united and peaceful isn't something that comes to us naturally. There are times when the unity of the spirit fights the sinful nature inside of me. I'm sure you can relate. Pride is easy. A quick temper and a refusal to forgive—those are the things that come very easy to us.

God tells me that the key to this unity is “humility, gentleness, patience and the constant effort to bear with one another in love.”

It's hard to have unity. I think we all know that our church is not immune to conflict. There are a number of examples in the Bible. Paul, (who wrote these words) had a very serious dispute with his co-worker, Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas went on a missionary journey together. A man named John Mark had also gone with them but he left them in the middle of the trip. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark on the second missionary trip as well. Paul refused and they disagreed so sharply that they decided to work separately. The Corinthians had divisions in their congregation because they were following different leaders. There were some that liked Paul and some Apollos—and this caused friction. It became a detriment to God's work and Paul had to speak to them about the situation.

Growth takes place in a church when all the parts work together, as Paul says in verse 16, **“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”** Growing together is a joint effort that takes the work of all of us. People who aren't willing to work together in the church are kind of like hitchhikers. What is the mindset of a hitchhiker? “You buy the car, pay for repairs, insurance, and gas and I'll come along for the ride. But if you have an accident you are on your own...And I'll probably sue you.” It can be very easy to approach the work of the church in the same way. “You go to the meetings and serve on the committees, you grapple with the issues, do the work of the church, and pay the bills. I'm just here for the ride. But if things don't go my way, I will complain and probably will bail out. My thumb is always out, looking for a better ride. God calls us to be united and to live in peace. It takes the combined effort of all of us to grow. Even one person trying to cause friction can easily destroy the unity of the church.

As long as there are sinful humans in God's church there are going to be personality conflicts and power struggles. God's encouragement for us is clear. He has forgiven us. He has worked faith in your heart, and he gives you the bond of peace with each other. That peace is a stronger bond than any difference that could separate us. In fact, God has brought us together so that we might serve his purpose. The unity among us is so important because the work that we have joined together to do is so important.

So the question remains: Why do we go to church? Because we need each other. Have you ever noticed what happens to a burning coal when it rolls away from the fire? It burns for awhile but eventually dies out. However, when a burning coal stays with the group of other burning coals, it keeps burning too. When we stick together as a congregation, our faith will burn stronger and stronger also. I feel blessed and honored to be a part of this church and to help with it's growth. Even though we're not worthy, Christ has called us into his Church. May God use his church to help us grow up and grow together until he comes again to take us home, where we will enjoy true unity in heaven! Amen.