

Unity

Ephesians 4:1-6

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, September 23, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Ok. In order to do that you will have to know what your calling is to which you have been called. In Ephesians chapter 4, God is not talking about the everyday callings of your life. So here He is not talking about being a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker. Although those callings are important and they are ones to which God calls you, they are not the callings that He is talking about in Ephesians, chapter 3.

The calling to which God is referring in Ephesians, chapter 3, is the calling of all Christians everywhere, but specifically within their congregations to unity.

There is one body and one Spirit.

When God says there is one body and one Spirit, he is not talking about the fact that you have one body and one spirit. The body to which He is referring is the body of Christ. God describes the body of Christ in numerous places. There is the body of Christ in which He is incarnate. That is the same body that He gives you in the Sacrament of the Altar. That is the same body of which all of you are members. So Christ's body in which He performed His ministry, which was crucified, ascended on high, and sits at God's right hand is the same body that He gives you in the Sacrament of the Altar to eat is the same body of which you are members. Since this blows the mind of us human beings God typically talks about only one aspect of His body at a time. The aspect that He is talking about this morning is the congregation and His whole Church.

All of you have been called to be one body, the body of Christ. Just as your own body is made up of many members so also the body of Christ is made up of many members. This is why in spite of the fact that young people today do not join organizations as a general rule, we still talk about "members" of the congregation. The reason that we talk about "members" of the congregation is because that is the way that God talks about them. And who are we not to talk about things the way that God talks about them?

Each of the members of your body has a different function. In the same way each member of the congregation which is the body of Christ has a different calling and for that calling different gifts which we call abilities.

That is what God means by one body. So look around at the people on the pews surrounding you. You are a member of the same body of Christ of which they are also a member. You are joined together in one body.

There is one Spirit.

Just as God was not talking about your body when He said that there was one body so also He is not talking about your spirit when He says that there is one Spirit. When God says that there is one Spirit He is talking about Himself, the Holy Spirit.

Earlier in the book of Ephesians God instructs us that through Christ He has torn down the dividing wall of hostility that stood between Jew and Gentile. The dividing wall of hostility that stood in between Jew and Gentile was God's own Law. Not only did His Law demand moral perfection. His Law also made in clear that Gentiles were excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. Gentiles were not blood descendents of Abraham. Gentiles were godless in the world and being godless they had no hope. That is the dividing wall that God tore down in Christ.

By His death Christ abolished the Law with its regulations that stood against us. By His death Christ credited us with a righteousness that we could never have obtained by the Law and by doing so made keeping the Law unnecessary for our salvation. By abolishing the Law He abolished that which excluded us Gentiles from the commonwealth of Israel. Thus Gentiles are now welcomed into covenant with God along with Israel. The dividing wall of hostility is gone and by tearing down this wall and uniting with both Jew and Gentile God has made the two into one body. That is to say that Jews and Gentiles are now united in one body in Christ.

This body is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus is Himself the chief cornerstone. So like so many places in the Bible God calls His people the body of Christ and at the same time God calls His people the temple of God. Just as God lived in the temple in Jerusalem in the Old Testament in a special manifestation of His glory so also God lives among His people in the New Testament in a special manifestation of His glory. Throughout the Old Testament God had hinted that things would be this way, but now in Christ He has made things this way.

It is this temple of the Church manifested in the local congregation in which God, the Holy Spirit, dwells. The Holy Spirit is the fullness of God and so the fullness of God dwells in the Church and in each congregation. The Holy Spirit does not apportion Himself out in pieces, a little to one congregation and little to another. He apportions Himself out completely to each congregation and dwells in each congregation in His fullness. This is the one Spirit to which you have been called. By being a member of the congregation the fullness of God, who is the Holy Spirit, dwells in your body also as God attests in 1 Corinthians, chapter 6.

Now, there is only one Holy Spirit. There are not numerous Holy Spirits. There is not a Holy Spirit for each individual member of the body of Christ. There is only one Holy Spirit. So the same Holy Spirit that fills you with His fullness is the same Holy Spirit who fills all of the other members of the congregation. The Spirit to which you have been called is the Spirit to which all of us have been called.

Your calling has only one hope.

The hope that Jesus Christ has given you is the hope of resurrection from the dead and life everlasting before Him in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Our Lord Jesus Christ will return in glory. The apostles testified to us of His glory during His earthly ministry. On the basis of that glory they report to us His promise that He will return again in glory. His glory will be seen by all nations. He will then raise the dead. That is why Jesus says that even the ones who pierced Him will see Him in glory. The reason that the Roman soldiers who pierced Him will see Him in glory is because He will raise them and all of us from the dead.

At that time the heaven and the earth will melt in the heat. The fundamental elements of the universe will be laid bare. Nothing will escape His judgment, not us and not the creation. The old order of the creation will pass away. Jesus will replace the old heaven and the old earth with a new heaven and a new earth. The new heaven and the new earth will not have death in them. There will be no dysfunction in them as a result of the dysfunction of sin. The creation will once again be prepared for a righteous humanity to live in it.

Once the dead are raised the glorious Lord Jesus Christ will judge them. If a person has received His righteousness in this life, he will be prepared to face Jesus Christ in the judgment with a righteousness that is not his own, but with the righteousness which Jesus Christ granted him in this life. If a person has not received righteousness from Jesus Christ in this life, then he will not be prepared to stand before Jesus Christ in the judgment because he will have only his own righteousness and not the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Such a person is damned.

Jesus Christ gave His life in order to obtain the righteousness with which He prepares you to face the judgment. His death and His shed blood atoned for all of your sins. Your sins are forgiven and once they are forgiven you are righteous before Him. Since you are righteous before Him, you are prepared to face Him in the judgment and He will welcome you into the new heaven and the new earth to live with Him without suffering, pain, and death forever.

That is the future that He has guaranteed to you by His death and resurrection. Therefore that is the hope that you have. It is the same hope for each of you.

It is not like one member of the congregation has one hope and another member of the congregation has another hope. Perhaps the translation, "In My Father's house are many rooms," has led us to the conclusion that we will all be living in separate rooms in the Father's house with our own personal paradise prepared for us the way that we like it. What our Lord promises is that there are many places in the Father's house. His point is not to describe a literal house in which you will live for eternity, but to inform you that there is room for you in the Father's house. There is a place for you. He has not excluded you.

Your common hope is that all of you together with the whole congregation together with the whole Church will inhabit the new heaven and the new earth. You will live there in righteousness and blessedness forever. You will live before Him forever in His glorious presence. There will be no more sin, no more death, no more crying or pain.

That is the one hope.

There is only one Lord.

I suppose that is obvious to say, but God takes the time to say it, so apparently it needs to be said.

With so many lords in this world promising us salvation and demanding our loyalty in return for the salvation that they promise, it is important to say, "There is only one Lord."

We may not recognize many lords in our American context where we do not use the word "lord" in a political sense any more, but that does not mean that we Americans have eliminated lords. There are still plenty of lords even in America. All of them vie for your loyalty and all of them promise you salvation of some sort or another. Some of these lords are persons, some of them are groups of people, and some of them are things or even substances that we ingest demanding our loyalty and promising us salvation.

But you were not called to any of these lords. And frankly the salvation that these lords promise you is either a temporary escape from the problems of this life when what you really need is deliverance or they promise you a salvation that is only for this life and when you are dead their salvation is over. In exchange these lords like all lords demand your life. They demand your money in greater and greater quantities. They are never satisfied. They demand your time and attention and always want more or their salvation will quit coming. They are false lords with false promises and false hopes.

There is only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other Lord. He is the only one who died for your everlasting salvation. He is the only one who sacrifices for you before you sacrifice for Him. He is the only one who gives you His salvation up front and for free. He is loyal to you and then you are loyal to Him.

And He is the Lord of His whole Church. He is not the Lord over part of it and He leaves the other parts to some other Lord. Your Lord is Jesus. The Lord of every other members of the congregation is also Jesus. There is no other Lord so the Lord you have is the Lord everyone else has.

There is only one faith.

The Bible speaks about two different kinds of faith. There is the faith that believes in Jesus with which we are all familiar. There is also the use of the word faith to describe what a person believes. In English we call it "the faith." This is the kind of faith that we are talking about when we say, "passing down the faith to the next generation." We cannot make the next generation believe in Jesus and so we pass down to the next generation what we believe about Jesus. We pass down "the faith" once delivered to the saints as the Bible says. When we pass down this faith we will pass down the doctrines of the Word of God. When we do that we will pass down the Word of God and the Word of God will create the faith in the next generation that believes in Jesus. So "faith" and "the faith" are never separated from each other even though you can distinguish between them. And because they are never separated that is why the Bible uses the word "faith" for both.

So it doesn't matter which meaning of the word to which God is referring in Ephesians, chapter 4. There is only one faith.

If He is talking about the faith as the body of doctrines of the Word of God, then there is only one body of doctrines from the Word of God. It is not like there are many separate sets of beliefs and one member of the congregation has one set of beliefs and another member of the

congregation has another set of beliefs. Even though that is true, that is not the calling to which you were called. In other words when members of a congregation disagree about what they are supposed to believe that is not the calling to which God has called you. When members of one congregation disagree with members of another congregation about what is to be believed that is not the calling to which God has called you. There is only one faith. And if God is referring to the body of doctrines that people believe when He says that then there is only one body of doctrines to be believed.

And if God is talking about the faith that believes in Jesus, then there is only one faith there also. There is only one faith in Jesus because there is only one Jesus to which God has called us to believe. If you want to know who the one Jesus is in whom faith believes, then consult the body of doctrines that God has given you. That body of doctrines is the Word of God that gives you the one Lord. It enables you to determine who He is and who He is not.

There is only one Baptism.

There are not numerous baptisms. There is not one baptism of water and another of the Spirit. Jesus says that you must be born again of water and of the Spirit. And so there is only one Baptism of water and of the Spirit. This is the one Baptism that you have received.

The Baptism that you received is the same Baptism that every other member of the congregation received. It is not like all of you were baptized into different names. You were all baptized into the same name, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is not like all of you were baptized in different elements. You were all baptized in the same element, water.

Therefore every member of the congregation no matter how long they have been a member of it is just as baptized as every other member of the congregation.

There is only one Baptism.

And finally and most obviously, there is only one God and Father of all.

There are not many gods each one especially designed for each one of us. There are not many gods one for the Jews, one for the Muslims, one for the Christians, and one for every other group that you could name. There is only one God. He is the Father. He is the Father first of all of our Lord Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ, He is our Father also. He is over all no matter who they are. He is through all, that is to say that He operates and works through all in spite of the fact that He is distinct from all. And He is in all. That is to say that He fills and inhabits all things.

And the point God is making in Ephesians, chapter 4, is not some philosophical point about God. He is not trying to settle debates about pantheism versus panentheism versus theism. All He is trying to tell each of you is that as an individual member of the congregation you have the same God as every other member of the congregation.

You are therefore unified. You are unified in one body, inhabited by one Spirit, under one Lord with one faith, baptized into one baptism with one God and Father of all.

The exhortation from God is this: since all of you are unified with one another in this way, act like it.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.