

A warm Welcome to Worship on Sunday 1st August

Words of Welcome

Opening Hymn Hymn 124 Praise to the Lord

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation;
praise God, my soul, for in him, are your health and salvation;
come, all who hear, into his presence draw near,
joining in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who in all things is wondrously reigning;
shields you from harm and is gently yet firmly sustaining!
Have you not seen how your hearts' wishes have been
granted by God's wise ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who with blessing and power will defend you;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend you;
ponder anew what the Almighty can do:
God will for ever befriend you.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him
Let the Amen sound from God's people again;
gladly for ever adore him.

Opening Prayer

As if there were no other time
As if there were no other time
Be present here Oh God
In all your fullness
In all your goodness
In all your purpose
In all your desire to transform us

Because there is no other God
Because there is no other life
Because there is no other redemption
Bring us into full reliance on you
Trusting in you alone
Believing in you alone
Hoping in you alone

Because there is one Lord
Because there is one hope

Because there is one baptism
Unite us together
With all your people
On earth and in heaven

Forgive us our sins
Our grasping moments of mistrust
Our self-justifying moments of pride
Our narrow minded moments of self-interest
Our desire to privatise faith around our own small gods
Our desire to avoid the challenge of a faith which draws us into justice and solidarity with all who are oppressed
Our desire to steal from our children – the coolness of the skies and the cleanness of the seas
Forgive us all these things

And in the silence now we confess

Silence

And now let us know that we are forgiven,

AMEN

Reading Ephesians 4:1-16

Unity and maturity in the body of Christ

4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 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 to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it^[a] says:

‘When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.’^[b]

⁹ (What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions^[c]? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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 people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 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.

Sermon

One

Ephesians 4:1-16

This morning, we are going to engage with a passage in Ephesians 4:1-16. And I want to say a little of how we are going to do this. Often with a passage I will try to find one or two or three (one can never get away from three points) angles and distill some kind of essence.

This morning I am going to take what is sometimes called an expository approach, to go through each verse in turn, or perhaps one or two verses, and two explore how this verse adds to our theme.

But if there is one word that I would like to unify everything that gets said here today, it appears in verse 5-7 of Ephesians chapter 4.

There is
One body and
One Spirit, Just you were called to the
One hope, which belongs to your call
One Lord
One Faith
One Baptism
One God, and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all

If there is a central idea here, it is that there an essential unity between

- The kind of community the Ephesians are, and the kind of God, that God is

In other words, people should be able to look at the life of the Ephesians, and say

“God looks like? What does God look like? God looks like them?”

And an essential unity between the Ephesians and the Ephesians

- The Church should be characterised by its unity. Unity in a Church is not a thing you try and get after you have got all the truth sorted out. Or a thing that you sort out after you have sorted out the membership. Lets get the kind of members who are going to be right, and we'll unite with them. No unity is where you go first

And an essential unity between the members of Ephesians and Jesus Christ, in particular in Ephesians, Christ who is the head, and the members who are the body, growing together in love.

So it's possible that you could see a world where the kind of community that the Ephesians are, and the kind of God who God is, and you would say two, they are different, but no, they are to be ONE.

And it is possible that you could have a world where the Ephesians went to the same Church services as each other, but essentially in heart and concern, they were two. But Paul says, no. When you look at these people where, I don't want to see 100, I don't want to say 10, or 3-4 groups, or two sides, I want to look at these people here, and the first number that comes into my head is the number "ONE".

And what about the Ephesians and God. This is one where we can every easily just say "One". We are used to language which talks about us being one with God. About being in Christ. But just let that sink into us for a moment. This is the gospel.

When we look at the story of Adam and Even humanity from God, we look at humanity and God and say "two" or perhaps "three", but in this passage, that number is "one"

When we look at the story of Moses going up Mount Sinai, to meet with God in the cloud and the fire, we would say perhaps two, or three, but in this passage, that number is "one"

When we look at the story of Jesus and the disciples, all the misunderstandings, all the moments of not getting it, the running away at the end, when we think of ourselves and Christ, we think, "two" or "three" but this says "one".

Or when we think of the images that we have been given of God, either in Sunday School or in singing of hymns, or in BBs or GBs, or deep in our psyches where God becomes like a fearsome figure of condemnation or guilt or begrudging acceptance, we think of ourselves and God, we say "two", but this passage here says "one"

Or when we think of our struggles with self-acceptance, or our struggles with our mistakes, or our deep sense of inadequacy, or our failure to become in life what we had wanted for ourselves, we look at ourselves and Christ, and we

say “two”, a very far apart “two”, but here we are being invited into a story which says “one”.

So the first thing I would like us to do this morning, is to think of the challenge of that number one, and how it embraces us into the quality of our life, the bonds between each other, and closeness between us and Christ, and says to us “one”.

Therefore

Now I want to pull us back to the first verse of this entire passage.

It’s “therefore”.

In English the first word is often, “I” but that’s just to get the grammar to work.

In Greek, it’s a “Therefore”

“Therefore I”

Now one is often taught when studying Paul, a good rule with “therefores”

Whenever you see a therefore,
You need to ask, what is the therefore
There for.

What is the therefore, there for?

Therefore’s are connection between what’s gone before, because it is essential to get you into what goes after.

And that may seem obvious,
But in this passage the point has to be made.

So what comes before the therefore?

What comes before are really three things

1. Firstly a statement by Paul that he’s in prison, but don’t worry about this, because God is using this
2. God’s love is wide, and long and high and deep – what we spoke about last week
3. God can do everything, it’s in this magnificent song of praise to God at the end of Ephesians 3

“now to him who is able to do abundantly more than all we ask or think, be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever, AMEN”

So you’ve got three things before

- You might feel like you're in prison, but he might still be using you
- God's love is huge that the only metaphor we can use for it is space itself
- God can do much more than we even ask or think

Therefore,

Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you were called.

And the reason that the Therefore is important, is that often we try to do the last bit without the first three bits....

We try to do the

"Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you were called" which is a high statement of living up to a voice which has called to be something,

And we try to do it without

- An understanding that trying circumstance can still be fruitful circumstance, and so we become beleaguered, rather than curious and hopeful that even this can be used

We try to do it without an understanding of the bigness of God's love, and instead do it in an understanding of small love, therefore, it is not long before we are condemned or abandoned by God, and what is the point

And we try to do it without an understanding of the power of God, and so we think that whatever circumstance or pattern we are in is beyond God, that the dungeon we are in is inescapable.

And we might finally say that the guy who is saying this is in a Middle Eastern 1st Century prison, if anyone has earned the right to say, none of these things work, it's him, but he's saying this to us

Walk in that manner with the therefore, with the knowledge that even prisons can be fruitful, that love is huge, that God is able

And now do the walking, walk in the manner worthy of the calling to which you were called.

Which you were called when you first perceived that God might have made you

Which you were called when you first sensed God asking you commit to him

Which you were called when you sense that God might be asking you to move to a certain place, or a certain work, or a certain relationship

And walk in this therefore.

Connection

And the final thing is also a one.

Because if you look at the passage here, Paul is asking that in our life in community we continually connect the story of Christ, with the life that we lead.

When he talks about calling, actually the calling he talks about is not to a post, or a place or a status, he talks to a posture of humility.

In fact not just any humility, but all humility, every single bit of it
And not just to gentleness
But to all gentleness.

In fact the whole community is a striving to be a kind of unity, a kind of humility, a graciousness that has the courage not to put itself forward because it believes that God has done everything.

It is a community which invested in its together,
Because it believes that the big story of God, the big language of God,
Needs a community which embodies these things,
In the way that it looks out for each other
In the way that it is characterised by the way of Jesus

Paul is not asking for the best strategy here
Paul is not asking for the numbers
He is asking for one

He is asking for this community to do something that no pagan ever thought
was a thing to strive for
To be humble
And gentle and peaceful

To count each part of supreme value.

And this connects with the big story of God,
So suddenly Paul launches into a story about Jesus ascending to heaven
And leading a host of captives
And handing out gives
And ascending and descending
In rhetoric the like of which we see in John.

And we hear of gifts being given of Apostles and Evangelists and Prophets
And Pastors and Teachers

And do you notice that the first three of these gifts
The Apostles, the Evangelists and the Prophets
Look out,

The the last two

Pastors and Teachers look in

This story of Christ
These big gifts

Are all for this

That this community grows as a community that looks like Jesus, each one of us on a journey to looking like Jesus, a journey that is individual and communal

And all of this so that we look like a body
When “each part is working properly, builds itself up in love”

Do you see this connection, between the big story of God, the story of Christ,
And the story of this community – which is humble and united and gentle and peaceful

This is what we are called towards
The story is one
That we are one
And that us and Christ together are one

This is our calling
Let us lead the life to which we are called
AMEN

Hymn Hymn 739 The Church's one Foundation

The Church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation
by water and the word;
from heaven he came and sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her,
and for her life he died.

Called forth from every nation,
yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation:
one Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses,
and shares one holy food,
as to one hope she presses,
with every grace endued.

In toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war;

she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore,
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
and the great Church victorious
shall be the Church at rest.

Yet she on earth has union
with God the Three in One,
and mystical communion
with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with thee

Prayer for Others

Oh Lord,
We pray to you
Knowing that you hear our cry

We cry to you
For this virus still ravages in India and in Brazil
And threatens us here in the UK
For the courage of politicians
For treatments which cure
For commitment to halt the spread
For the spreading of information and the end of lies
Lord hear us
Lord hear our prayer

We cry to you Oh God
We cry to you for our communities of faith
That we would live with true community
That we would welcome in the stranger
That we would contend for truth in a world where fleeting pleasures are prized
We pray for our Churches that they would be Churches without walls
Places of true community

And also now we pray for those whom we love
Those grieving
Those unwell
Those carrying great burdens on their shoulders
For these we now pray...

Silence

And now hear us we pray in the words which Jesus taught us
Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts
As we forgive our debtors
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory
AMEN

CLOSING HYMN Hymn 182 Now thank we all our god

Now thank we all our God,
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever-joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us,
to keep us in his grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
who reigns in highest heaven -
the father and the Son
and Spirit – now be given:
the one, eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore;
for thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore.

BLESSING

May God who is one
Hold you as one with him,
Nothing ever to separate you

May God who is one
Hold you as one with those you love
The Spirit's bond between you

May God who is one
Draw you ever nearer
Into the image of Jesus Christ

In the name of the Father
And of the Spirit
And of the Son

AMEN