

"Bound Together" (Jo)

July 15, 2018

Scripture: Ephesians 4: 1-16

*<sup>4</sup> I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

*<sup>7</sup> But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." <sup>9</sup> (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> 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.*



Over the first three weeks of this series, as we worked our way through the first three chapters of Ephesians, we primarily talked about what God has lovingly done for us and about what God wants to continue to do for and through us.

This week and as we continue to explore that last two chapters of Ephesians, we will explore how we should live in response to that love. Today and over the course of the next two weeks, we will look at some challenging calls to discipleship. As we look at these calls, we must remember what we talked about last week: we answer and live into the call only through the power of God and only with the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Let us pray...

To begin today, I would like to share a story from back in 2013. That summer I helped lead a high school mission trip to the Henderson Settlement. Henderson is a VIM or “Volunteers in Mission” site situated in the hills of rural Appalachia. My team, along with three other teams, were assigned to building fence for a goat pasture. On Monday we trooped out into the woods with a couple of bundles of t-posts, a couple of thousand-foot rolls of welded wire fencing, a few buckets of horseshoe nails, and various tools – hammers, pliers, shovels, axes, prybars. Our task was to use trees and as few t-posts as possible to install a fence in a fairly straight line along the edge of a basic utility road. Monday was a great day. With forty of us, we got a lot of fence installed. Here is a picture of part of the crew at work.



Tuesday morning, we awoke to a good, steady downpour. At breakfast the project manager said we could not go out into the woods – it was too muddy. He said he had another couple of projects that we could work on. We hopped into his vehicle and drove over to the farm. Our first stop was at a garage with about ten 5-gallon buckets of mixed bolts, nuts, screws, nails, and so on. The task was to sort these into like items. It smelled of gas and oil and other chemicals, but it was dry. Next, we headed on to the barn. The entire basement was goat pens that needed cleaned out. In my highly non-professional opinion, it looked like they had not been cleaned in about 25 years. I said we could handle this and we went back to the dining room. We assembled the four teams, decided which one was tackling the buckets, and the other three teams headed to the tool shed. We gathered up rakes and shovels and wheelbarrows and began the short trek to the farm. Outside the barn I explained what we were doing, we went inside and got the lay of the land, and we got to work. Here are a couple of pictures of our teams cleaning stalls. Molly is the young lady with the grey shirt and white hair tie. I think Molly's smile says it all - 'Yup, I'm here. Not too happy, but I'm here shoveling goat poop'. In reality, the kids and the adult leaders were such good sports. There were two lightbulbs in the whole basement and about a thousand spiders in the damp, stinky basement of that barn. Yet, we joked and laughed and had a ball cleaning out the goat poop. In the rain, we hauled all the shovels and rakes and wheelbarrows back to the shed on our way to lunch. We even rinsed them all off before putting them away in the shed.



The kids were proud of getting the ten or so stalls cleaned out and were eager to find out what we were doing after lunch. So, at lunch, I found the project manager and asked what he'd like our teams to do after lunch. He said, "No way". He insisted that we could not be done, loaded me up in the vehicle, and drove back to the farm. He walked into the basement, looked around at each of the stalls, and, by golly, we were done. He said it was the cleanest the stalls had ever been in his time there at Henderson. That brought us back to the question: what are we doing after lunch? We walked outside the barn and over to the adjacent lean-to that was on the north side of the barn. It was about 15 feet wide and ran about 80 feet, along the entire side of the barn. At the opening to the enclosure, there was hardly any goat poop. But at the far end, it was about two feet deep. Guess what he wanted done after lunch?

My mind immediately went to "mutiny on the bounty". How could I tell those three teams that we were headed back into goat poop? They were so happy to be done as we walked to lunch. Nasty task accomplished. Not much could have been worse, but they jumped in and did the job at hand. I was proud of them. And now I had to tell them we were going back to scoop more poop. We gathered after lunch and, after swallowing hard, I let them know what we were doing after lunch. No mutiny. No whining. No groaning. I was as shocked as the project manager had been when he walked back into that barn. We grabbed our shovels and rakes and wheelbarrows and again headed for the barn. We spent the next three hours shoveling and raking and hauling goat poop to the ever-growing mountain outside the barn. And a funny thing happened that afternoon. As we worked, we sang lots of Christian songs and we joked around

and we simply had a ball. Here are a couple of pictures of our afternoon work. Look at the joy on their faces. We became a family that afternoon, bound together by our common experiences with goat poop. For the next few trips, any project was stacked up against the goat poop. Few could compare. It became legend. It was an inside thing that was shared amongst us goat poop scoopers during the next few mission trips.

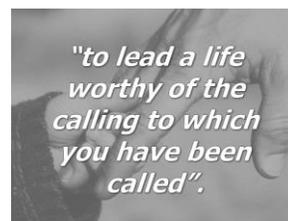


Our experience was, in a strange and odd way, a little bit like what Paul is writing about in Ephesians 4. We were called to a task that required much humility. It would have been easy to balk at the task placed before us – especially after lunch when we had to go back. Despite our difficult situation, we did work together in love, making every effort to complete our calling. As we did so, we grew together as a team, as a family. We each found our roles too. The bigger ones took turns running the wheelbarrows. The littler ones swept and moved things as we cleaned. The rest ran shovels and rakes and scooped poop.



Paul, of course, is not writing about scooping goat poop. But he is writing about how our common experiences, our common faith, and our common calling in Christ – can bind us together. In Ephesians 4, he is writing about how the church is to be unified in Christ and about how the church is to function as a human body would – in unison and with each part playing its role as the body of Christ.

To begin, Paul addresses how we are to live as Christians, as individual people of faith, in the world. He begins by encouraging us to *"to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called"*. Paul then goes on to outline the qualities we are to have in living a worthy life. These qualities are humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity, and peace. When we think of Jesus, these are qualities that He lived out. So, it makes sense that as His followers, we too should strive to live out these qualities.



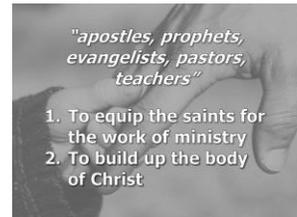
When we do live humbly, offering kindness and patience, bringing love into all situations, seeking to build cooperation and peace, then we are modeling Christ for others. Only then are we living a life worthy of Christ's calling upon our lives.



Paul then addresses what makes us one body. In verses five and six, he writes that there is *"one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all"*. John Wesley would call these the essentials of our faith. These were the things that all Christians should be able find agreement on. For the most part, the concepts of one Lord, one baptism, one faith, and one God are universal throughout Christianity. In the larger sense, these concepts do bind churches around our community, state, and world together as the catholic or universal body of Christ.

As we move into the middle section of our passage for today, we find some of the "jobs" that help the church to function and to grow in faith. Paul calls these 'gifts' and they really are gifts that God has given to each person who calls on

Jesus as Lord and Savior. New flash: we all have gifts. In verse eleven, Paul gives us a partial list of giftings, saying that some were gifted to be "*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers*". Each of these giftings work together for the good of the body, working for two main purposes: to equip the saints for the work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ. As these two purposes are accomplished, the body matures in faith and unity and becomes more and more like Christ. This, of course, is the goal of every church.



But as we learn in the next verse, this is not always the case. In verse fourteen, Paul writes, "*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*". Paul is acknowledging that at times we in the church can act like children. Instead of acting this way, Paul is urging the church to become more mature in the faith. One would have to guess that the church, much like we can be today, was being influenced by society and culture and the world around them. Imagine what that must have been like. Imagine what it would be like to have culture influence the church...

We do not have to imagine very hard to envision this, do we? It is our reality. Today there is an almost constant battle to live by faith and God's will versus living by the voice and the ways of the world. Things have not changed that much since Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians almost 2,000 years ago. The church was struggling to live a life worthy of the calling amidst the cares and temptations of the world. The church today continues in this struggle.

In Ephesians 4, verse 15, Paul challenges us to face this struggle full on. Paul uses these words: *"speaking the truth in love"*. What would that look like? What words would need to be spoken here? Could we bear speaking the truth in love? Could we hear truth when it is spoken into our lives?



Paul tells us what happens when we are willing to speak the truth in love. He goes on in verse 15 to tell us why we must speak the truth in love: *"we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ"*. When we speak the truth in love, it helps us to grow and to become more and more like Christ, the head. When we grow together in Christ, we are *"joined and knit together... each part working properly... building itself up in love"*. Have you ever experienced growth either personal or in your faith because someone cared enough to speak the truth in love? Yes, it might have hurt a bit at the time. But when we are able to hear truth and to allow it to help us grow and mature – whether as a person or in our faith – then it is a good thing. A by-product is that it often draws us closer together as we come to appreciate that the person or persons loved us enough to speak the truth.



Some had shovels, some had rakes, some ran the wheelbarrows. In those dark and stinky and disgusting goat pens, we certainly faced our own little struggles. The voices in our heads, the voices of the world, said to whine, to complain, to grumble, maybe to run away. But the voices in our hearts, the voice of God, said we are here to work together, to play our roles, to accomplish the task that has been set

before us. Together we humbly accepted our calling that day and we worked as one, bound together by our common lot, to persevere towards our common goal. Finding great success, we were elated. But the man said, there is more to clean. Based on the bonds that we had begun to form that morning, we were able to return together, closer than before, to accomplish an even greater task that afternoon. Here is a picture of Cece, Madeline, and Lexi atop the pile of old hay that we also amassed that day. Don't get distracted by the big pile of goat poop just behind them. Focus on these young ladies. Can you see the sense of purpose and accomplishment showing on their faces? This is what happens when a group of believers comes together and functions as the body of Christ.



We know that as this body of Christ, part of what binds us together as one is His love. But what really binds us together are those times when we roll up our sleeves and work alongside one another. The big church remodel project and the basement plumbing ordeal are great examples of times when working together brought unity to this church. When we are united, joined together, each offering whatever gifts and graces we each bring to the table, we build each other up in love. In turn, we also build our community up in love. We will do that at VBS this week. We have and will continue to have many other opportunities in our future together. Perhaps God is at work right now, stirring up the next opportunity to grow closer together. May we go forth as individuals and as a community of faith, to live a life worthy of our calling in Christ, bound together to build God's kingdom here on earth. May we be willing servants, ready to offer all we can. May it be so for you and for me this week. Amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) What gifts and graces has God given you? (We all have them!) How can you use these to help the church grow in Christ?
- 2) How could you lend more of a hand building God's kingdom – is it with a person, an organization, a role here at church? Pray for guidance.
- 3) Where might God be asking you to scoop a little goat poop? Pray for the courage and will to accomplish this task that God has placed before you.