

The Rock: 02-23-20

First reading: Ephesians 2:14-19

Title: The Family of God

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-7

Theme:

When the people of God walk together in all of their diversity, we find a unity in the Spirit which manifests itself in love and peace.

Introduction:

Transitions are sometimes the most frightening things we face. How we navigate them, negotiate them, and most importantly, grow through them -will determine their success or failure.

Human nature always seems to get in the way. Personalities, opinions, uneasiness and fear can work to unsettle us. Making transitions a bit rocky

Quite often though, when we settle ourselves in the truth of God and find, that the majority of the time, we want deeply to do as God desires, things work out as they ought.

God's word is such a beautiful guide as He lays out a process for how we are to

be His people. It is there we go today as we meet one another.

When you gather together as a group of people who are not used to each other, not used to gathering together as you do now, with different cultures, socio-economic standings, family backgrounds, educational background, and religious background, it can be unsettling.

Top all of that off with the notion that now men and women are equal in every sense of the word. Slave and master as well find themselves on the same level ground.

None of this had ever happened before. You would almost think we were talking about our culture and society today -and in a sense you would be right.

But we aren't. This was the challenge of the early church, one which Paul the Apostle, Peter, James, and John all wrote letters about.

Doing so as a way of challenging this new group - the People of God, to help them transition into a new way of being, living and doing life together.

Learning how to become the family of God in a world of confusion, class, and cults of personality.

It's difficult, if we are honest, because it's not normal. How can you bring together so much diversity and expect to be unified about anything at any level?

This is still the question and the challenge today isn't it? Looking around this room 2,000 years on, and seeing the beautiful diversity of what we call "The Church - The Body of Christ."

This is one of the many reasons Paul wrote this letter called "Ephesians". Written to one of the many churches he had planted on his journeys, and now pastored by a young man by the name of Timothy.

They seem to be struggling with how to, in all of this new diversity, be one body.

The Story:

Maybe this morning, you already know these things, or maybe you are still learning. I am too. This journey together is really a reminder, for me anyway, of things I shouldn't forget.

And walking down this road as I study and unpack this passage, I always find myself learning something new.

Because Paul, the brilliant writer and theologian that he was, takes the first

three chapters of his letter to remind the church at Ephesus of a few things.

First, who they are "In Him" that is in Jesus.

Second, what they are to do because of that.

Third, the churches role in the society and culture it finds itself in.

So, before we can really understand what it means to walk in unity as the family of God, with all of its diversity, we need to understand as believers, all that God has done for us as individuals.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his little book *Life together* says this:

"We recognize...that only as we stand alone within the community can we be alone, and only those who are alone can live in the community. Both belong together."

-Life together: Pg. 83

In other words, we have to know ourselves as individuals AND as part of the unified community of believers. We cannot have one without the other.

That is where Paul starts in chapter one as he maps out all of the things we as individuals are "In Him".

"...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ..."

-Ephesians 1:4-5 ESV

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace..."

-Ephesians 1:7 ESV

"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit..."

-Ephesians 1:11-13 ESV

It is important to know who we are in Christ as individuals first, in order to be a healthy, vibrant part of the family of God.

You are you. Deep insight, I know. But seriously, you are uniquely you, created by God, in Christ, to do certain things in this world.

Things which only you can do. Trying to be like someone else, or even be someone or something other than what God has called you to be, means the church and the community misses out.

Why? Again, only you can be you. Profound wisdom, I know, but I am going somewhere. Well, get there already...

Ok, in chapter two, Paul continues to unpack what God has done for us:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

-Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV

Probably my favorite verses in the whole Bible. We are saved by grace through faith, Paul reminds the Ephesians and us as well. But not just so we can sit and be glad of that.

But we have been saved for a purpose -IN THIS WORLD- We didn't have anything to do with it, but now that we are "In Jesus", Paul tells us in verse 10:

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

-Ephesians 2:10 ESV

We are His artwork, His poem actually, as the word is better translated.

Created for good works which God planned for you. This could be a sermon in itself, but I think it is enough to find great comfort in the words here.

If God has done it, (saved me) and has things for me to do, I don't need to be worried about how things will work out.

I just need to be obedient in the assignments he gives, each day, resting in His care. I don't need to try and figure it all out.

I just need to know that His providence is a soft pillow upon which I can lay my head. Trusting Him in the process.

Paul moves us into what we know as chapter three next, and starts to bring the individual into focus as the community.

He reminds the Church that together they also have purpose -what is that?

"...that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."

-Ephesians 3:10 ESV

The Church, full of, and made up of different individuals, united 'In Him', by the way we live and function, actually makes known the wisdom of God.

But there is a hint of a struggle here, and I see it in verse 6:

"This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

-Ephesians 3:6 ESV

This mystery being unpacked and revealed is that the Gentiles are now part of God's family, because of what Jesus has done.

Not a big deal for us in 2020 where the majority of the Church is Gentile. But this notion of the Gentile being full heirs of the promises of God was a hard thing to navigate and process for the Jewish people.

It's a brand new map they're are on now, this **Family of God**. A lot of diversity that no one was really used to, there is so much we can and should learn.

Because if we are honest, we still struggle with this today. Perhaps it's not Jew / Gentile, but there is always an

undercurrent of who really belongs at God's table.

If we aren't careful we can shut the door when we should be holding it open. When God calls people to himself, it always happens in all of their brokenness and sinfulness.

Were it not for people such as my aunt and uncle, Dennis Chevalier, Lucy Cunningham and Pastor Roland looking beyond the mess, I'm not sure I'd be here today.

This is why we have chapter four, and not just because it comes after three. It is the turning point in this beautiful letter with its big fat "THEREFORE".

In other words, because of all these things God has done in you and for you as individuals, this is how you are to behave as my people in my world.

Now, let's be honest, this is no easy task, even today. Such diversity, opinions, thoughts on how things ought to be done, how we address the pressing issues of our time can divide a community of believers-

You know, do we go with the soft aloe tissues here in the sanctuary, or do we go with the rough cheaper ones?

Paul starts here with:

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.."

-Ephesians 4:1-2 ESV

You have been called -now walk in a manner worthy of that call. You are my people and what should be the character of your walk?

Humility - Gentleness - Patience

Why? Because doing so promotes unity within all the diversity we have. Even here in this room today.

It allows us to be launched out into the world in such a way that we are firmly rooted in this Jesus of Nazareth -and yet, walking in the grace of Christ that will win hearts:

"...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that 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."

-Ephesians 4:3-6 ESV

Let's think on this. I've been wrestling with this for some time and posted on Facebook, yeah I know, but hey it is a forum that can be used for good or ill.

"Too often in the body of Christ we mistake uniformity for unity. In other words, seeking to get all into the same line, with the same thoughts and opinions. Doing as told with no deviation or division.

Unity is NOT that. The beauty of the body of Christ is actually found in its diversity and ALL that entails.

You see, it is God who has brought all of that uniqueness and diversity together by the grace of Christ:

"But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."

-Ephesians 4:7 ESV

And THAT makes us family.

You see, true unity is far harder than uniformity because it does not demand conformity. Instead it requires exactly what Paul tells us here: Humility - Gentleness - Patience.

Bearing with one another IN LOVE.

We need this because of the varied gifts, personalities, and differing backgrounds here in the body of Christ.

Bearing with one another in love -drives us and leads us to an eagerness to maintain unity (not division), in the Spirit.

The results of that is peace, even in the midst of all our differences, and the frictions that comes with that.

It drives us, in my mind, and in my encouragement to you, to the Scriptures and to prayer.

God has this completely under control and need to remember: His providence is a soft pillow upon which we ought to rest our heads.