**Ephesians 4**

Matt Royston

Skagway Presbyterian Church (11 am)

**Title**: Transform

**Other Scripture:**

Father God, open our eyes…

Jesus open our ears…

Holy Spirit, Open our hearts…

So over these past few weeks, we have been looking at the letter of Paul to the Church of the Ephesians. And as we have been going through the words that Paul has for this church, what we are discovering is Paul’s instructions for us…instructions on what it means to grow up into the people God created us to be.

You may remember that in the first week of this series, Paul told us, that we are people God Chose to Bless for the Praise of His Glory. That’s our identity, and that’s our purpose. We were created for this purpose…but we don’t just simply start doing it. In fact, much of it seems un-natural.

For instance, our identity means that we are not self-focused…we are God-focused. Well, as anyone who has ever been around a newborn knows…newborns, naturally, are pretty self-focused. Eating, sleeping, and receiving love…that’s what newborns do. And that’s natural…and that’s fine…for awhile. But as they grow up, we expect them to start shifting their focus away from their-selves. You can’t grow up if you are totally focused on your self.

So Paul tells us to grow up into the identity of our faith. Well what does that mean?

When God created every single one of us, God had an end in mind…something we could grow into. When God made me, Matt, God had an “Ultimate Matt” in mind. And my life of discipleship is a life of growing up into that fullness. I’m striving to become Ultimate Matt…the Full Matt God created me to be! I’m not there yet.

AND similarly, when God brings you all together, God has an ultimate “1st Presbyterian Church of Skagway” in mind. And you are not there yet. There is more growing to do.

Now, God loves us just as we are. There is nothing we need to do to earn God’s love. HOWEVER, The truth of the Gospel of Jesus, is that while God loves you, and me, and this whole world, God’s love is a love of transformation. The love of God is greater than simple affection. It’s a love that refuses to let us continue on in the broken, incomplete states we currently live. God loves us as we are, but God loves us too much to leave us that way.

Today, we look at one of Paul’s most helpful bits regarding this maturing…growing up process. We will read from Ephesians 4. 1-16.

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A few years ago, the Church lost one of our most powerful voices. The author and speaker Brennan Manning passed away in 2013. Manning was born in New York City during the depression. He was a Marine who fought in the Korean war. After, he went to seminary and became a Franciscan Priest, dedicated to living among the poor.

Manning was very open about his life-long addiction to alcohol. He talked freely about his strides forward and his setbacks as an alcoholic. In that journey, he left the priesthood in 1982. He got married. 8 years later his marriage ended, he says, due to his drinking.

All through his life, he battled with alcohol. Never perfect.

And yet through this very difficult and all too “real” life, Brennan Manning had an enormous faith. He truly believed in the love and redeeming grace that God offers in Jesus. His life was evidence to the reality that maturity in faith is not based on a single decision or a single action.

Instead, faith matures over the course of a lifetime. Not just the good things, but maybe even especially in the difficult things. He held on to the faith that God loved him through these times and was even transforming him in the midst of them. Manning knew that real Christian faith is not flashy or elegant or even necessarily exciting.

AND…it is anything but instantaneous.

It’s the long, slow process of Christian Transformation that becomes so frustrating for many of us. In today’s world, we are primarily consumers who demand results. We require measurable outcomes.

And if something doesn’t happen now…today…then we get frustrated and look for something else to capture our imagination.

Brennan Manning knew that there were no shortcuts to the way of Jesus. He once said, “Only when God’s love for us goes from information in our head to a deep understanding in our heart, does lasting transformation come about.” The reality is, the movement of information into transformation takes time, and it takes intention.

So, you may or may not know this about me, but I enjoy words. And in this particular passage, the words themselves are worth paying attention to. Two words worth considering are in the very first sentence.

The first word is “Calling.” In Latin, the word is Vocare from which we get the word “Vocation.”

Our calling is our vocation. A vocation is the set of things which God asks us to be, or to do, or to participate in...the various hats we wear. We tend to think of vocation as a job. That’s not a biblical understanding of vocation. Vocation will likely include a job, but it also includes the other roles you hold…roles that are used by God to do His work in the world.

Your vocation may include a particular role you have in the schools, the community, or the church. Your vocation may include raising children, or caring for aging parents.

If we are people God chose to bless for the praise of His glory, vocation is HOW we live out that identity.

We each have a vocation….a Calling. It’s unique to each one of us. It’s given to us by God. And we don’t instantly fit that calling perfectly. We grow into it. We should actually expect that God will call us to do things that are out of our comfort zone…we should expect to be stretched and challenged.

So, we are each given a Calling, and when we live into that calling, we are stretched…we are changed…we are transformed.

But HOW?? This is the big question, right? How are we changed…how are we transformed?

Well Paul tells us…but it’s not likely what we want to hear. Because Paul doesn’t give us three easy steps, or the secret formula. There is no weekend seminar.

Paul doesn’t give us a plan, he gives us a way of life.

Transformation comes, but it comes through a way of life.

And at the center of that way of life, is the community of believers…the church. This is where we realize that the growing process is both individual and communal. It is for me personally, but it’s also for us as a congregation. AND, it’s not one without the other. Growth for the individual and for the community go hand in hand.

That brings us to a second word. The word is literally “the gathering,” or we use the word today, “the church.”

The Church has a calling. Its calling is to be Christ Jesus in the world. The Church is The Body of Christ, Paul says in 4.12 and other places.

Every specific church has the vocation of BEING the body of Christ for the sake of the world. Your particular church has a narrowed vocation of being the body for the sake of your local context…Southeast Alaska…Skagway...

And discerning that call and living into that call…is a life-long process. So often in our attempt to move quickly and deliberately, we come up with two or three things that we will do to reach our neighborhood…and some of those things are great…but they are only a piece. Because the Body of Christ is an ongoing, living, organism (if you will). It’s not a program.

CHURCH is not something we do, it’s a way to BE…it’s a way of life. Being the church is the way in which we live and exist among and with each other…glorifying God for the sake of our town.

See God…somehow brings all of your particular calls together…and folds them into the Bigger Call that your congregation carries.

Somehow, your vocation which includes government worker, and your vocation which includes parent, and your vocation which includes teacher, and your vocation which includes shop-keeper, and Ryan’s vocation which includes pastor…somehow these things all come together in how You are called to be 1st Skagway.

And figuring out how all that will work together is not something that fits nicely in a strategic plan. You’ll only figure it out as you do it, and as you do it together!

So…back to the words… The final word is the Greek word Parakaleo, we translate to URGE. Urge could also be translated “encourage.” You may know that Jesus uses the word Paraclete to refer to the Holy Spirit…The encourager, the helper…the advocate.

Paul says, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have been given.

So how is that helpful? Well, in this book of Ephesians, Paul gives the Church three forms of language to use in its life together. The first form is Kerygmatic…which means preaching. The church preaches the Gospel. The second form of language is Didactic…it’s the teaching language. The church teaches the faith. Preaching and Teaching are the two forms of language we most commonly think of in church life.

But the third form of language is the Paracletic language. The language of encouragement. In chapters 1,2,3, Paul has been preaching and teaching, but here in chapter 4, Paul is encouraging the church in Ephesus. He switches language forms.

We in the church absolutely need the Preaching language and the Teaching language…but we also need the Paracletic language. It’s the language we use as we discern and embody the calling to which we are given both individually and together.

Paracletic language is the language we use with each other in our life together. It’s the language that we speak when we are together in our small groups. It’s the language we use when we pray with each other. It’s the language Deacons might use when the visit people at home or in the hospital. It’s the language you use when you take a kid out for ice cream.

It’s the language Lori uses when she helps a young person in the Sunday School classroom. It’s even the casual fellowship language you use at lunch after worship each week as you catch up and visit.…paracletic language…language of encouragement.

On Friday mornings, I attend the weekly Men’s Prayer Breakfast at Chapel… And it occurs to me that for years and years, there have been men gathering together…every week…to share life…to hear updates…to take prayer requests and pray together…and certainly to have fun in the midst of all of that. But every week for many years…this group of men come together to speak parcelticly to each other. And through this speech…and through being together…each man has been somehow transformed.

Paracletic language is the language of community…the language of our life together.

So what guidance does Paul give us in speaking this language? Well, Paul is very practical here:

Be completely humble. Be Gentle. Be Patient. Bear one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through peace.

We didn’t read it, but if we zoom down to verse 29, Paul continues, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up….Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as Christ forgave you.”

So this passage calls for a response. It calls for you to ask this question…how are you doing here at 1st Skagway? Are you doing what Paul urges us? Are you growing up as you grow together?

Are you humble? Are you gentle with each other? Are you patient and loving…do you keep a spirit of peace and unity? Are you kind and compassionate to one another…forgiving one another? Now you might be different, you’d know better than I, but every church I’ve been a part of could answer those questions like this: “Yes, but there is room to grow.”

You know, we’ve all been disappointed by the church at some point. My guess is everyone of you at some point, has been disappointed by the church. Maybe a small thing, maybe a huge life-altering thing.

AND, as long as your church…like every other church is made up of incomplete, not-yet-there people…like me and like you…then there will be disappointment. And frankly, we will continue to disappoint each other…in one way or another, it will happen.

But are we growing? Are we getting closer? Are we making movement? Are we in it together?

God has begun good work in you…but God’s not done…you’re not there yet.

If you want this church to be THE community God has called you to be, then you need to practice paracletic language. Make it your language.

Let’s pray.