

**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity: September 22, 2024**

**“It’s Who You Are, Not What You Do”**

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this morning is our Epistle lesson, Ephesians 4.

One of the simplest and at the same time hardest things for Christians to come to terms with is the reality that we are created to be someone, not to do something. The calling of God is not for you to do anything, but to simply to be, and thereby you simply walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. Remember from just two chapters earlier, your entire being has been changed; restored in Christ, ***“You were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”***<sup>1</sup>

This is who are. Baptized into Christ. Restored by faith into the grace of God. Rescued from death and the devil, you still live in this world as *simul justus et peccator*, saint and sinner at the same time. As you live in Christ, the devil prowls around seeking to lure you away from the peace of God that passes all understanding. He wants you to be ever curious of what lies just outside of your sight, so that that you lose the peace that comes from the surety of God’s Word and Holy Sacraments. But you belong not to the world, not the devil, not even to yourself. You belong to Christ, Your Lord. This is who you are.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:1–10

Paul speaks to you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, ***“I therefore, a bondservant for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner 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> eager 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 that belongs to your call—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”***<sup>2</sup>

What is at stake for the Christians in Ephesus is also what is at stake for you. It is not the unity of the church. Rather, it is your continued connection to it. The unity of church does not depend on human endeavors; it relies on the grace and working of God. This also means that it cannot be destroyed by human neglect or hostility. It will certainly try, but God’s victory is already secure and not even the gates of hell can prevail against the Word of God.

Paul writes this letter while in prison and the background is of importance, because you can draw many conclusions and sources of comfort in Christ. You can see how things really haven’t changed and how there is nothing new under the sun; yet, God’s grace is still given freely through God’s Word and God’s Holy Sacraments. Paul was arrested, officially, on charges of bringing a Gentile (Trophimus, an Ephesian) into the forbidden parts of the temple. Unofficially, the Jews were furious over his proclamation of Paul’s seeming attempt to undermine the Law, by incorporating the Gentiles into the kingdom of God without first having to be circumcised. God uses Paul’s imprisonment, however, to show the consequences of the Gospel and a testing of Paul’s faith. He is one who still endures suffering, and suffers for the sake of the other members of Christ’s body.

After Paul was arrested, he spent a year and a half in Caesarea and then two years of house arrest in Rome. He was stripped of his freedom, and his time belonged to someone else. Paul is bound in Rome, because He refused to back down from the Gospel. He could not stop being who he was.

Paul could not stop doing it, because He was a prisoner and a bondservant of someone else. He already had a master to whom he belonged. The words He spoke were not His own. They were given to Him to hand over to all who needed the forgiveness of sins.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:1–6

Being a prisoner of Christ, was something that was given to Him. He didn't make the choice on His own. He, like you, could not by his own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, his Lord, or come to Him. The Holy Spirit called Him by the Gospel, enlightened Him with His gifts, sanctified, and kept Him in the truth faith. These were gifts given to Him. His sins were drowned and died, faith was given, and Paul was born into the body of Christ. God made Paul a new man.

Christians are not called to do something. The world and false Christians have tried to cram that down our gullet, and they didn't have to try too hard. We love the sweet taste of being able to mark the check-off list. We can't wait to hear a Pastor tell us, "This is what you have to do." It gives us a purpose and a goal. We can measure our success, and point out other's failure. It is a perfect recipe for me to do the things and feel good about myself; or to not do them and play the victim card of how unfair life is to me.

Again, God does not call you to do something. He calls you to be someone. You are a slave, a bondservant. You have a master. By faith, it is the One True God. This Paul rightly understands, and so as a prisoner, He is able to say, "I urge." To the English ear, this sounds like doing. The connotation of the word is better understood as encourage or comfort. Hear again, "I comfort you to walk." To walk is a deep Old Testament thing. Walking is the Old Testament image of the life of faith. God is all about talking the talk and walking the walk. Your words and your actions are to line up. Which God do you serve? Do people see it from your mouth and hear it from your hands? "***Golden apples in silver settings, a word spoken at the right time.***"<sup>3</sup>

So what is the calling to which you have been called? "***One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.***"<sup>4</sup> You have not worked your way to become a part of this faith. You have not worked to keep the peace among your brothers and sisters in Christ. These gifts are given.

The church is, by its very nature, one. The Large Catechism confesses, "*This is the sum and substance of this phrase: I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love*

---

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 25:11

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4:5-6

*without sect or schism.*”<sup>5</sup>

To be in the Body of Christ is to be given unity of mind and Spirit. As a servant of Christ, two things are immediately given: humility and unity. There is a popular notion, albeit a false one, that claiming to have the truth is sinful pride. I cannot count how many times I have been confronted with something like, “You insist that you have the truth. How arrogant. God tells us not to be prideful, Pastor, and you are asserting only one truth. You are a prideful, mean spirited, devil worshipping bully. That is just your interpretation.” Now, that is the clean version. To claim truth will bring accusations of inflexibility and intolerance.

First things first, we must get away from the word “interpretation.” There is not another’s interpretation. There are translations, but there is only one interpretation. God gave His Word in human languages for us to know and to cling at all at times. God gave His word so that even a child could read it and be strengthened in their faith. His Word is meant to be read/heard, and faith strengthened; which means sins realized and Gospel given.

These are not words to be toyed around with. These are not words that can be disposed of when they become uncomfortable. These are not mere playthings. These are God’s gifts. These words belong to the whole community of saints. The Liturgy, which simply reads and sings the words of God, belong to the whole church. The Word of God, and His Holy Sacraments, are unifying gifts given to us that we take great care to hold on to tightly. We are servants of Christ, what else can we do?

Brothers and sisters, these are Dad’s Words. When it comes to His Words, we must be intolerant and inflexible. We have no right to tolerate any other teaching that goes against the Word of God. If you don’t know what it says, read it. If something is English seems funky, find what the original word is.

Don’t only read it alone, your sinful nature may come to all sorts of self-justifying conclusions. Be constant in study and prayer, which begins in the Word of God. Be constant in fellowship with the communion of saints, because as His servants, they live as you.

---

<sup>5</sup> Large Catechism; Third Article of the Creed, p. 51

What does that mean? They too are sinners. They are weak and frail. They err and they are selfish. The sinful nature bests them, but does not define them. We can tolerate their weaknesses. We have a few of our own. The very center of God's mercy is the reality that we are forgiven freely for Christ's sake. When this precious pearl is placed before us, we can see the precious saint that God has placed before us, and can live in gentleness and patience with them. We can put up with erring siblings. We cannot put up with erring doctrine. To put up with false doctrine, even just a little, is an attack on faith. It divides the reality of the body into which we have been placed. It seeks to redefine who we are, as those who belong to Christ and Him Crucified, who alone has paid for our sins.

This Body has been crucified. It has born all failures and sickness, all disease and pain, all selfish back-stabbing and bitter biting. It has carried upon its shoulders the darkness of sin, the pain of God's wrath, and the eternal burden of death. It has taken these things upon itself, and with these things it is has been nailed to the cross. The Body of Christ has suffered, been crucified, died, and was buried. The same Body of Christ has been risen from the dead, and lives and reigns to all eternity.

This same body of Christ is to what you now belong. There is one baptism. One washing. One birth into this holy family of God. You, who were born a slave to sin, are now born a slave to righteousness; a Child of the Most High God. This washing brings you in the one body with the one Spirit.

The Large Catechism again confesses, *"Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought to it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word, which is the first step in entering it. Before we had advanced this far, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ."*

*Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community or Christian people. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in the fruits of the Spirit.*

*Further we believe that in this Christian church we have the forgiveness of sins, which is granted through the holy sacraments and absolution as well as through all the comforting words of the entire Gospel. Toward forgiveness is directed everything that is to be preached concerning the sacraments and, in short, the entire Gospel and all the duties of Christianity. Forgiveness is needed constantly, for although God's grace has been won by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God's Word in the unity of the Christian church, yet because we are encumbered with our flesh we are never without sin.*

*Therefore everything in the Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and through signs appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live. Although we have sin, the Holy Spirit sees to it that it does not harm us because we are in the Christian church, where there is full forgiveness of sin. God forgives us, and we forgive, bear with, and aid one another.”<sup>6</sup>*

This is who we are. We cannot help but walk in any other way. We are members of the body of Christ. We have been given forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. We have been given unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Thus we may ever pray,

“My heart's delight,  
My crown most bright,  
O Christ, my joy forever.  
Not wealth nor pride  
Nor fortune's tide  
Our bonds of love shall sever.  
You are my Lord;  
Your precious Word  
Shall guide my way  
And help me stay  
Forever in Your presence.”<sup>7</sup> Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>6</sup> Large Catechism; Third Article of the Creed, p. 52-55

<sup>7</sup> Seek Where You May to Find a Way LSB 557:4

**Prayer of the Church  
Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity  
22 September 2024**

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For patient faith to serve the world in the name of Christ, with patience and humility, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For this congregation, its mission and its people; for the ability to do the work God has given us to do; and for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For parents, that they would continue to devote their households to the Word of the Lord and prayer, to bring their children to Christ's font, to faithfully to instruct them in the proper understanding and reception of God's gifts of Word and Sacrament, and to encourage their faithful and regular attendance at the Divine Service so they may gladly hear and learn God's Word, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For humble and wise rulers to guide the nations, that they would receive their authority with patience from the hand of God, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially *Kevin, Kistie, and Rylee*; and those that celebrate another year of earthly life, especially *Dale*; that God would send His holy angels to guard and keep His children; that they may thank and praise him for the gift of life and for the protection and care He has provided; that God would grant them to grow in grace, continue to know His loving-kindness, abide in the confession of His care and protection, serve Him faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; let us pray to the Lord: **Lord have mercy.**

For the joy and blessings that God has granted *Joel & Danielle and Nathan & Stephanie* during the years of their marriage; that God would assist them always by His grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards Him and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that He has promised; let us pray to the Lord: **Lord have mercy.**

For those who are ill, suffering or in sorrow especially *Dick, Gavin, Esther, Ruth, Ann, William, Zoey, Jeri, Pastor Small, Debbie, those we name in our hearts*, that they would be comforted by the Lord's promise of constant care and mercy; and for those who mourn, that they would be comforted by His promise of reunion with Christ and their loved ones who have died in the faith, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those gathered to eat at the feast of the blessed Sacrament, that taking the lowest place in repentance and pleading His mercy alone, our hearts may be lifted up to the honor of receiving Christ's body and blood, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. **Amen.**