

“Who Am I?” August 5, 2018

Lakewood United Methodist Church

Ephesians is a short letter compared to the other 12 letters that Paul wrote and this is the only letter that addresses globally-based church life as opposed to local church situations. Paul mentions the singular you only three times when he is quoting the Old Testament. It may be for this reason that many scholars cast doubt that Paul was the actual author of the letter and that the real author signed Paul's name as a tribute to him.

Nevertheless, Ephesians is a powerful letter that directs our focus to realize God's purpose and power along “how to” conduct our lives for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

Today's scripture from the lectionary gives us practical ways to fulfill God's purpose in this church in unity with all Christians, with maturity in our own understanding, and renewal of our personal life.

Ephesians instructs us to reject our sinful ways and take on a new attitude in our minds that we are the children of God. And we are to be imitators of God! We are to live a life of love, just as Christ loved us. Finally he tells us how to prepare ourselves, to protect ourselves by putting on the full armor of God. Ephesians 6: starting at verse 13

¹³Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The letter goes on to cover personal relationships between ourselves and Jesus, the Christ, between husbands and wives, and between children and their parents.

Ephesians reminds me of when I first joined my current prayer and share group, my “accountability group”!

This group of men over the last 20 years has changed little. Oh, the faces and names have changed as we lost our friends, but the

replacements have kept the same format. We all know each of us would do anything for each of the others. They are there to catch me when I fall and lift me back up. Sharon and I also have a group of close friends who would do the same for each other, and I hope you also have such a group.

Anyway, when I first joined, my group was studying Patrick Morley's book "The Man in the Mirror". This book invites men to take a probing look at their identities, their relationships, their finances, how they spend their time, what kind of temperament they have, and the big one, their integrity. The idea is this: If you are not happy with the person staring back at you in the mirror, the book directs you to take steps towards lasting change!

In our scripture from 2 Samuel this morning, David did not have a mirror to look at, but he did have a friend. A friend named Nathan. A friend who delivered the Lord's message to David that he was messing up and he was not being a good example for the kingdom. It was like a look in the mirror that caused David to change.

As many of you know, I also participate in the Kairos Prison Ministry. In their weekend retreat, one of the first talks given to the inmates is entitled "Know Yourself". The message encourages each person to look at themselves closely. To think about their life leading up to this point. What is important to them? Who is important to them? What makes them happy or sad? What do they want their future to look like? And how to get there? They are encouraged to consider what changes they need to make in their lives in order to accomplish their long-term goals. For an inmate, that change can be dramatic! Often, to change, it requires that they not return back home to their families when they are released, because they would be returning to the environment that led them to prison in the first place. It means new friends, a new life. It requires them to take off their mask and examine who they really are.

1995 is the year that I consider that I became a follower of Jesus. That was when I first saw my reflection, and I did not like what I saw! At that time I said that I would go where ever God lead me, and he has taken me sooo.... many..... places that I really didn't want to go!! But, it does not end there. Let me give you this example for better understanding:

You buy a house to live in with your family. Imagine that over the years you do nothing to the house except live there. As the house ages, it develops a crack here and there. Maybe the gutters fill up and overflow.

The toilets leaks and wastes a lot of water. The shower starts to get discolored and a little mold or mildew grows in a corner. After a time the water overflowing the gutters gets into a crack in the siding, allowing insects and what not to get in. The wood starts to rot. So what do you have after a few years? A house that requires remodeling because it has aged badly!

It is the same with us! In 1995 I was on fire for the Lord, ready to follow anywhere he would lead me. Then age started to creep in. One thing I forgot to remember was that becoming a Christian does NOT make your life simple by taking away all your problems! All the temptations that were there before were STILL there! I realized that if I didn't do some "remodeling" in my life, I would end up worse than when I started my journey!! But... Jesus gave me a way to overcome them!

I **need** my accountability group that holds my feet to the fire. I **need** worship to revitalize me each week. I **need** Bible study to keep me involved in the Word. I **need** my daily devotions and prayer time with God, and I need to associate with my Christian friends to help me witness to the dark side.

I know that if I don't keep up with the repairs and remodeling, the temptations in life will overwhelm me.

Yes, we all wear masks. We get up in the morning and decide, shall I be myself today or shall I wear a mask of who I think I am or how I want others to see me. Yes, we have a mask to put on for church, another for Bible study, a different one for work, another for play.

What I invite us all to do is to remove our masks. Think about who you really are. And most importantly, what does it take to be a real follower of Jesus?!

So, you are aging, and the cracks are forming, stuff is beginning to leak in. I do not know your sins, but Jesus WILL give you a way to overcome them!! To be the person He wants you to be.

Amen

(Roger Pike)