



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

June 28, 2015

"Grown-Up Christianity" (Worthy Series) - Ephesians 4:1-14

The Rev. Tim Shaw

The Apostle Paul, the guy who wrote this letter we're studying, was once a man who was totally opposed to Jesus Christ with every fiber of his being. At one point he was committed to doing absolutely everything he could to stop the Christian church. But God met him one day while on his way to arrest a group of Christians in the city of Damascus. God knocked him off his horse and there on his backside he did some theological reflection. The risen Christ appeared to him and his life was never the same.

Paul knew what it was like to be pursued by God and then forgiven and embraced by God. He understood what grace was all about. He was so grateful for what had been done for him that he wanted to spend the rest of his life living in ways that were worthy of what had been done for him. He was a man who knew from personal experience what it was like to have Jesus Christ make him worthy of a relationship with a holy God. He knew that Christ alone had qualified him for that relationship. It had nothing to do with what he had done, except that he had to put the full weight of his life down on Jesus Christ.

With one Greek word, 'axios', right here in verse 1 of chapter 4 of Ephesians, the apostle Paul challenges us to live lives that are worthy of the One, who by His grace, has made us worthy to be in a relationship with a good, loving and holy God. *"Lead a life WORTHY of the calling to which you have been called."* That's how the apostle Paul starts the second half of his letter to the Christians in the city of Ephesus. *"Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called."*

He's calling us to rethink our priorities, to reconsider how we spend our time and our money, to reflect on how we interact with other people in light of what has been done for us in Jesus Christ. Jesus has made us worthy to be in a relationship with God. Jesus has made a relationship with God possible. Once we were dead in our sins. Now, because of Christ, we are alive in Him.

How we live our lives should increasingly reflect that we get that. *"Lead a life that is worthy of the calling with which you were called."*

But check this out. What points out in this section of his letter is that it is impossible to live the kind of life he's talking about if we try to live it on our own. We need the support and encouragement of a community of people who are together seeking to live lives worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need each other. We can't go it alone.

In the first half of chapter four, Paul talks about the community that can help us live lives that are worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the rest of his letter he's going to get super specific about what a life like that looks like in marriage, as a parent, in our jobs, as friends, as people living in a specific culture at a specific time in history.

But before he gets into all of that, he's first going to talk about how we can support one another in living a life that is pleasing to Christ. And that, he says, has everything to do with how we come along side one another and encourage and affirm and support each other.

Paul is going to remind us that we are designed by God to move through life in community with God and with one another. One of the other amazing things he says in this text is that God has given every single one of us spiritual gifts that we need to unpack and begin to explore and use in ministry. We need people to look into our lives and see what God is doing. We often need people to point out what we sometimes can't recognize in ourselves. We need people to see God's handiwork in our lives, to name it, to affirm it and encourage it.

Paul's also going to talk about five kinds of people that God has given to the Christian church. These gifted people are given to a community of Christ-followers to help that community grow up into Christ. They help us live lives that reflect that we are on our way to living as grown-up followers of Jesus. These people help us become "little Christs" in the world.

This August during WAKO, (WAKO stands for Wednesdays at Ko'olau), I'm going to teach a class called, *"The Gospel According to Pixar"*. Pixar Animation Studios in Emeryville, California, has created some of the most loved animated films, including "Toy Story 1, 2 and 3", "Monsters Inc.", "The Incredibles", "Up" and "Finding Nemo". They just released a new film called "Inside Out". I saw it this week and it is a fascinating study of the emotions that live inside all of us.

"Finding Nemo" is currently my favorite Pixar film. It's the story of a father and his son. They're clown fish who live on a reef somewhere near Australia. The dad, Marlin, is super protective of his one and only child. He extremely cautious with Nemo, not just because he's his son but because Marlin lost his wife and all their other children except Nemo at the beginning of the film. It was really intense!

On his first day of school Nemo is on a class outing to the edge of the drop-off. Nemo is so mad at his dad that he defies Marlin and swims out to a dive boat just to prove to his dad and to his friends that he's not a coward. On the way back to the reef, a diver who wants to give a fish from the reef to his crazy little niece named Darla, captures Nemo.

Finding Nemo is about a father's desperate search for his son. But primarily it's the story about how both Marlin and Nemo face their fears. For the dad, it's also a story of letting go and recognizing in his son what Nemo is actually capable of being and doing. Let's view one of my favorite scenes from the film. On his way to Sydney, Australia, Marlin meets a wise sea turtle by the name of Crush. Crush is going to show Marlin what fathering looks like in those moments when being a dad means recognizing and encouraging the potential in your child.

I love this scene for a number of reasons. First, Marlin will do anything he has to do to find his son. I love that picture of a father's heart for his child. Secondly, Crush demonstrates for Marlin how important extravagant, expressive affirmation is in the life of a child. It's incredibly important that every child be truly seen for who God is uniquely making them to be, that they be known, understood and encouraged.

And that need to be seen, understood and encouraged does not end in childhood. My life is still enlarged when someone takes the time to really get to know me, recognize what God is doing in my life, and encourage me.

The church of Jesus Christ should be a community where people regularly experience being truly seen, understood and encouraged. What Crush says to Squirt should be seen and heard in every ministry, every small group, every family, every meeting we have in this church. If we're not doing so already, let's pray that God would give us his eyes so that we might see how God is at work in one another's lives.

Let's take some of the energy we would normally just burn on ourselves and invest it in the life of someone else for their growth, their encouragement and their blessing. That's what Paul is encouraging us to do here at the beginning of chapter 4.

Ephesians 4:1 - *I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (you can't do that on your own - it only works in community.) Verse 2 (Here's how you create the kind of community we all need. We create it) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Paul says that humility, and patience, will create the kind of community where people will support one another and bear with one another through the ups and downs of learning how to live a life worthy of the gospel. Love one another and together you'll learn how to live lives worthy of the gospel.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, Paul gives what I think is the best definition of humility. Listen to what he says there.

Philippians 2:1 - *If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*

Here is one of the biggest life lessons that I'm learning and I started to learn it right here in

Philippians 2. It has to do with humility. Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York says, "Humility is not thinking LESS of yourself. Humility is thinking of yourself LESS." Spend less time thinking about yourself. Being humble is not about having a negative opinion of yourself. Humility is about how much time and energy you and I burn on ourselves. But it is more than that.

A truly humble person is willing to take some of the energy they would normally burn on themselves, on their own dreams, their interests, their needs and invest that energy, that time, that passion in the life of someone else. That's what a truly humble life looks like. That is what the life of Jesus Christ looked like. You and I are here today in this church because Jesus Christ thought of us and gave himself for us so that we might live. Paul says that we are to have that same mind that was in Christ.

To make a sacrificial, humble investment in others requires "meekness", Paul says. That's literally the meaning of the word translated "gentleness" in Ephesians. Meekness is great strength under restraint. It a word that refers to what happens when you bridle a horse. Great strength is brought under restraint and channeled for a useful purpose.

To make a sacrificial investment in someone else requires that we be patient with them, remembering how

challenging it was to grow as a disciple of Christ. It requires real love, which manifests itself in genuine excitement about what God is doing in the life of another person. It requires that we be attentive to what God is doing in another person's life. God is at work uniquely in the life of each of his children and we have the privilege of walking alongside someone else and affirming and encouraging God's good work in them.

That kind of humility is the foundation for unity, intimacy and peace. That kind of humility, that kind of patience, that kind of perseverance with one another is what grown-up Christianity looks like.

Why is it so difficult for us to be attentive to others? Why is so hard for us to express how we see God at work in the lives of other people? When I begin to share just a little bit of God's excited for what he is doing in someone else's life, it's then that I feel close to God.

All of us, especially when we're young, are crying out inside, "Did you see me, did you see me?" Why do so many of us spend so little time paying attention to what God is doing in someone else and then telling them, "You so totally rock!" That is a question worth thinking about.

Following Christ is a team sport. We need each other. We are connected to one another.

Look at Ephesians chapter 4
verse 4: *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,*
5 *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* **6** *one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

Our God is one God, yet a community of persons. God is unity in diversity. He's one God, yet Father, Son and Spirit. He is unity and diversity. We are made in the image of that one God and we are being redeemed by the sustaining and transforming work of the Spirit of God. Our unity in our diversity is one of the key signs of the work of God's Spirit in a community of faith. We are one body. We share the same Spirit.

Because we have a common need that only Christ can fix we have one hope and that hope is Jesus Christ. He is our Lord. We are called to one faith. We have all shared the same baptism in water and by the Spirit and there is one God who is our Father, making us sisters and brothers in Christ. We don't need to share all the same priorities and convictions. There is room for a diversity of giftedness and opinions and passions in the church.

Eph. 4:7 - *But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.*
8 *Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive (he set us free); he gave gifts to his people."*
9 *(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower*

parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

Our God is a gift-giver. He came all the way down from the heights of heaven to personally join the human story. He gave the church five kinds of gifted people to help the people of the church understand how they are gifted and how to grow up to maturity in Christ.

Eph. 4:11 - *The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 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.*

All of us were given spiritual gifts. Those gifts come from Jesus Christ. They are really his abilities, graciously given to us by the Spirit of Christ. Every member of the church has been gifted and is called into ministry. Some of the people in the church are primarily gifted to help equip the people of the church for the various ministries to which God is calling them.

Those people are themselves gifts to the community and include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Apostles are people who are the entrepreneurs of the church. They

venture into the world as pioneers, creating new ministries and planting churches. We need those people.

Others are prophets who have the special capacity to discern right and wrong and can speak words of challenge to the church and the world. We need them too. Others are evangelists. They are uniquely wired to share the good news of the gospel with those who have yet to hear the good news of Jesus and commit their lives to Christ. We need them as well.

We have prioritized in our leaders the last two kinds of gifted people: pastors and teachers. As valuable as pastors and teachers are we need all five kinds of leaders in the church. Our pastors care for the people of the church, discipling and mentoring them. Those with teaching gifts play a vital role in equipping people to know and understand the Scripture and live out the Scriptures in our lives.

All five of these leaders are needed to help the church grow in unity, to know Jesus Christ and to become little Christs in the world. Apostles are needed to move us forward. Prophets are needed to correct our course. Evangelists are needed to invite people into the community of faith. Pastors are needed to guide and mentor. And teachers are needed to help people begin to understand who they are in Christ and how they might live lives worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

The goal of all of that is that all of us would grow in Christian maturity; that we would all discover our gifts and God's calling on each of our lives.

The Apostle Paul has a goal in mind for all of us. He wants to see us all be equipped to do ministry because the ministry of the church belongs to the people of the church. I want to give you a heads up about something. Sometimes, people come to me and say something that sounds like this. "Tim, I think the church should be doing something about a certain situation that I want to tell you about." And then they proceed to tell me about a need they've identified.

It may be true that the church should do something about a certain situation but I want to give you fair warning of what I'm usually thinking when someone makes that kind of appeal to me. I'm thinking to myself, "Right. The church might need to do something about that AND since you're the church, what would you like to do about that situation?"

The ministry of the church, Paul says, belongs to the people of the church. So if you see a need in your community, your neighborhood, your small group, you might want to just go ahead and take responsibility for that situation and do something about it. I might be helpful in equipping you or your small group or your family in meeting that need, but since you're the church and since the church needs to do something

about that situation then you can count on the fact that there's a pretty good chance you're going to need to be directly involved in meeting that need. God has put it on your heart for a reason.

You see, God has given you spiritual gifts and he's given you these people, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip you for works of ministry for building up the Body of Christ. You're going to grow the most when you get actively involved in clarifying your spiritual gifts and your ministry and engaging the needs of your community and the world. That's primarily the way any of us will become mature followers of Jesus.

The goal before all of us is that we would all become little Christs. We are, indeed, a hospital for sinners and not a museum for saints. The Church Jesus envisions is a teaching hospital where no matter how we arrive at the church our goal is that all of us would begin to heal and eventually end up as a part of a healing team, ministering to other people.

We're gathering here today so that we might be equipped for our ministries to one another and our ministries to the people in the world. As Richard Halverson, the Chaplain of the US Senate used to say, "As one of your pastors I am a servant to the servants (that's you) of Thee Servant (that's Jesus Christ)." The ministry belongs to you and to

me. That's why we need to continue to grow up, to the full measure of the stature of Christ.

Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you were called. We're going to need one another to live like that.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org. The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com