

Ephesians 4:1-3 Common English Bible

Unity of the body of Christ

1 Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God.

2 Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, **3** and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. (This is the Word of the Lord) ((Thanks be to God))

Some of you may know that I have this verse tattooed on my right foot. I got this tattoo when I lived in Kansas City for a year and it was a very hard year to get through. I felt like I needed a bit of a reminder that I have been called to walk in a way that is worthy of the Call God gave me. Every day, putting on shoes I am reminded that God's call is all that is important. No matter where it is leading or what it is doing in my life. Even when times are awful, God's call remains.

Last summer, for instance, wasn't easy. I feel like at every turn someone was telling me that women should never be pastors. Much less queer people. And how could I, a queer woman, even think that I would be welcome in the pulpit? This negativity and these harsh words were actually the entire reason I was excited to come back to school this semester. I knew I would be welcomed back with open arms and endlessly affirmed within the call I feel so passionate about. However, I know that this summer was a part of that call as well. I know that we can't simply exist in perfectly affirming, perfectly safe spaces forever. God is calling us to change the world just as much as God is calling us to be in these spaces together.

Paul says, "Live as people worthy of the call you have received from God." You have received a call from God yourself. You may have heard your name clearly, and answered with a "here I am." You may have felt something so deep in your soul you couldn't explain it and proceeded to argue with that feeling for a little bit too long. You may have decided you would "try-out" this Seminary thing and see where it leads. In

every way, these calls are from God. And the God who created the entire Universe cares that you are here.

You may not feel worthy, you may be thinking that there is no way *you* are welcome at this table, at this pulpit, at this school. Time and time again, people have beat you down and told you you couldn't. But my friends, in every one of those moments, there was God. And God is telling you, specifically, that *you* are welcome here. You have something valuable to bring to the table, and to the conversation. You *need* to be at this pulpit so we hear your specific voice and your ideas about God. You are called to this school because there is something missing here without you. And I truly do mean that we are not whole without all of us here. You are worthy of the Call God has given you, no matter what you have heard from humanity.

In these calls, at this table, Paul encourages us to act with humility, gentleness, patience, and love. We all bring specific things to the table in front of us. We will hear from 4 people on Friday about the specific gifts they bring to the table. But today Paul is asking us to bring humility, gentleness, patience, and love but that's not always easy.

Have you considered what it looks like to truly conduct yourself with these gifts? Being humble when things are going well, being gentle when things are rough for others, being patient when life maybe isn't going as well as it could and being loving to everyone you encounter. And it's not just saying you're doing these things- it's truly holding them within yourself and who you are to yourself and other people. I often think the hardest part of the call to hold these gifts and conduct yourself in this way that you have to treat yourself with them as well. You can't just expect others to do it. You have to know you're able to be just as graceful and loving to yourself as you are to other people.

On Thursday, I was in Preaching and Worship through the Christian Year with Anna Carter Florence, we were having our first service of the Easter Cycle- celebrating Maundy Thursday in October. Lauren Scott was speaking her homily and it was all about the tables she has been around throughout her life. Including her kitchen table growing up. This got me thinking about the tables where we may not feel comfortable, the tables that are full of friends and family, the tables where we are all welcome. But

there are places, tables, and parts of life, where it's easier to be humble, gentle, patient and loving. And there are moments where this verse hits us in the face with its blunt message of how we are supposed to behave.

Paul is asking that we make an effort. That we at least try to act in a way that preserves the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties us all together. This verse reminds me of a parent, talking to their children. "Please, just get along with your sibling. You don't have to like them, but you have to love them. Just try." He's not even being harsh about it, Paul is just an exhausted parent at the end of a long day of hearing their kids bicker with each other.

In making that effort, we are preserving the unity of the Spirit and using the peace that ties us together. This particular verse reminds me that there is already a tie between all of us. Even when the people this summer were telling me queer women could never stand at a pulpit, there was a tie between us. A tie of peace and unity within the Spirit. It feels like an impossible thing to remember. When people hurt us so deeply, and when nothing feels like it can make that chasm smaller, there is still unity in the Spirit. We are still siblings in Christ, and we are still one body. We don't have to like each other, but we must love each other.

I imagine there is a situation you've been in that you didn't feel like loving the other people there. A time you were hurt, or angry, or just plain exhausted that you just didn't have the time or energy to give to anyone else. In those moments, especially, we have to remember that we are required to give an effort to remember the tie that binds us all, the Spirit that is in each of us, and that each of us brings something very specific to this table and in this space.

Each and every one of us has a call that is specific and intentional on our life, which is from God themselves. These calls are not simply our vocation or our position in life, instead, it is a call that reminds us we are worthy to have been called by God, and therefore must go about our lives in a way that acknowledges that call. We must be humble, gentle, patient and loving with each other, knowing that each of us is a full, beautiful, precious, child of God. There is unity in the Spirit, there is a peace that ties us

together. We collectively make up the image of God. The imago Dei is fundamental to our being, as natural as breathing. Take a moment to remember that image of God before feel unworthy, unloved, or unwelcome at this table, regardless of what humanity has told you.

((Amen))