

The Epistle of Macy

First Presbyterian of Ware Shoals

08.05.18

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 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. 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.

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 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.)

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. 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

This is the word of the Lord ((Thanks be to God))

In the letter to the Ephesians, the author shares with us some of the gifts that are needed in the church. He points out the fruits of the Spirit and names how they can be helpful in the future of the Church, by writing about “the gifts of some becoming apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” Above all is the bond of peace and love holding them together to be the Church. He calls people to work together to build their church up for the glory of God. The author makes it clear that the Ephesians can, in fact, expand their Church and that he believes in their ability to do so. We too have the ability to use these gifts and talents throughout our lives to complete the greater, God-given calls we have all been gifted for our lives. We can use these gifts to grow the church, and our community, and be the body of Christ in the world today.

To be that body, I truly believe we must be loving, graceful, and welcoming people. There is no way to be the body of Christ without these traits. Just as our Ephesians passage says, there is ONE body, there is ONE Spirit, ONE baptism. This one-ness connects us all. It seems incredibly freeing to spend our time demonstrating one God to others there is one body of Christ, in the spirit of love, that we are called to present to the world.

We present the body of Christ to the world with our actions and the ways we treat each other. There is only hope for the Church Universal, or for the First Presbyterian Church of Ware Shoals, if we are loving, graceful and welcoming people. For the record, there is also only hope of Lander University, Camp Fellowship, or churches in our areas if we are loving, graceful and welcoming members of the body of Christ.

Think about a time that you have been the new person in a situation. This could be a new job, it could have been meeting a new friend, it could have even been when you walked through these doors for the first time. Why did you stay? What made you feel welcome? All anyone wants in a new situation is to be loved, welcomed and given grace. That is what we are called to do by this passage and by Christ.

This congregation has been abundantly blessed with God-given gifts which you can utilize to bring new folks in, Y’all already have gifts of being welcoming, loving, and graceful.

I saw a welcoming home the first time I walked into choir practice. As Kevin and I got there, Debra asked me what section I sang in. I told her, with an awkward laugh, that I didn't

sing. She smiled and said “perfect. That means you sit right here next to me!” And I have sat in that seat every Monday for ten weeks of choir practice. This congregation welcomed me.

For me, one of my love languages is food. So I know for a fact I have felt the love of this congregation. I can't recall walking away from a church meal all summer without leftovers and multiple people wishing me safe travels. This is the most loving congregation I have ever been a part of.

Finally, the grace that this congregation displays is absolutely astonishing. This quality has been most important to me over this summer as I've been learning about what small church ministry looks like. For instance, in the moment I lost a page of a prayer last month, everyone simply told me it would be “better next time, to not worry about it, even the most seasoned pastors lose their places.” there is a sense of stress when you are the new member of a group, so this grace was especially important to me. The grace shown here made it clear that I was loved by y'all beyond my mistakes. That grace doesn't exist everywhere. And I am blessed and lucky to have found it here.

The ways in which Ware Shoals has embodied welcome, love, and grace extend far beyond the stories I've just told - which is part of the reason I've loved working here. However, there is a certain ease to being welcoming, loving and graceful to someone who has already bought into the mission and call of the group. The next challenge for Ware Shoals is to be the welcoming, loving and graceful community you have been to me, to every other person that comes through the doors. Even if they may not come back, even if they are only here for a moment, there must be the explicit message that they are welcome and they are loved, and will be given grace. To be honest with you, that may look like not asking them when they will be returning. People are family here as soon as they walk in the door. All y'all have to do is show people that they are part of our family.

I am excited for the future of First Presbyterian Church of Ware Shoals. I believe y'all can grow this church and make it the home that people need. I believe this because you have done it for me already this summer. In only 10 weeks, I feel like I am leaving home as I go back to Decatur. It will be incredibly hard to not be here on Monday for Choir practice, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for visiting people, on Thursday for the kick off of TOTALLY Thursdays. But as it is

so hard for me to leave, I know for a fact the people in this room and in this congregation, can show that same welcome, love, and grace to others.

Know that the action of growing this church, or your community may look like wandering in the wilderness for a while. Let's all hope that the wilderness isn't 40 years long this time. But if it is, we are still the body of Christ, and we still have a call on our lives and the gifts given to us through the Spirit. If the wilderness requires us to be tempted 3 times over 40 days during a fast, even though our body may be frail by the end, we will make it and we will persist, because there is a call on our lives and on our hearts. If the wilderness looks like failure, it will be ok because God's plan is larger than all of us. And God's plan includes a call for each and every one of us in this room and beyond it to be members of the body of Christ. There is nothing we can do to mess up the plan. The wilderness can look frustrating, or dangerous, or stressful. But the wilderness can also be a place of being faithful, trusting and graceful as we grow into the body we are meant to be for God. We must keep our eyes and minds on being the body of Christ and the impact we have in others' lives.

That body of Christ is here now, we don't necessarily need younger people to start building the future. No matter what the organization is, people always look at kids as "the future" of it. The freshmen are the future of a university. The Elementary School kids are the future of the church. The newly ordained pastors are the future of the denominations. Every young adult conference I've ever attended has had a day focused on "you are the future... what will you do with it?" However, I believe this isn't exactly correct. Why isn't the future of our church, university, or camp resting in every member? The universal church is evolving. We don't have the luxury of letting just the youth, or the young adults be the future anymore. We have to work together to move our churches and communities into the future. We all must be the body of Christ in the world to become the church God has called us to be.

We have been called to live lives worthy of the call we have received. We have been created, loved, and called by God to live lives for a distinct and holy purpose. That is an absolutely incredible fact. We must walk in a manner that shows everyone else that we recognize that call. It will be hard, and it may be a wilderness, and we may fail at times,

however, above all else, we serve God. Who is graceful. Who is loving. And who welcomes God's children back time and time again. We must go and do likewise.

Please pray with me.

Loving God,

You created us, you have loved us, and you have called us into action. God- help us be your body in the world. Help us see your path, and please light our way along it. Guide our conversations, be present in the thoughts of us and those we encounter, God show us your children who are searching for your light in the world. So that we may be that light and show them your ever-present grace and love.

In your most holy name,

Amen