

Sermon Series: As For You
Ephesians 4:1-16
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What a wonderful celebration last week of 150 years of ministry and mission at Boone UMC. I thought John Fitzgerald's words were perfect and the music was inspiring and uplifting. It was truly a beautiful day. As a part of our celebration we remembered the historic and significant connection we've had with the ASU Wesley Foundation. They are doing amazing work shaping disciples and leaders for the church. More and more, they need to rely on local funding for their ministry. So we've committed to invest in them in a significant way by designating mission budget and Faith Promise funds to the Wesley Foundation. I invited you to consider contributing to a special appeal for the Wesley Foundation that will help us honor this commitment. Last week we received over \$1,700.00 towards our goal of \$7,500.00. So I hope you'll consider helping us meet this goal today with a gift. Make certain that you mark your check or envelop with Wesley Foundation so that we can track those gifts. Thank you for investing in the next generation now.

There are sort of two distinct parts to the letter of Ephesians and with last Sunday's reading we actually brought the first half of the letter of to a close. John Fitzgerald helped us to remember that by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through us God is able to do abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine. It's another way Paul reminds the early Christians that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is now at work in and through them, that they are filled with resurrection power to be the people of God. That they, and we, can live lives that look like Jesus, lives that are radically different from the world around us because the very same power at work in him now enlivens our witness and mission. So this week was sort of an intermission and now this morning we turn our attention to part two of the letter to the Ephesians beginning with the section that we just read.

In the earlier chapters we've looked at Paul laid out our new reality, that in Jesus God has broken down the dividing "wall" between Jew and Gentile, and now offers through the blood of the new covenant, salvation and community to all people. The letter speaks directly to its Gentile audience (Ephesians 3:1), believers, like us once beyond the promises of God, gathered in communities and in cities throughout ancient Asia Minor....And in the midst of those communities, the claim is made that believers, followers of Christ "have been joined together into a holy temple in the Lord, Jew and Gentile alike have been built into... a dwelling place for God (Ephesians 2:21-22)". This means that followers of Jesus are called upon to abandon their old ways (Ephesians 4:17) and live in accordance with the new "temple" they have become. And so our passage today begins with one critical word - "therefore."

“Therefore”, it may seem like just a word to transition the sentence but used here it implies that the earlier material in the letter leads directly to the “architecture” of this new life. In using this one little word Paul invites the followers of Christ to lead a life worthy of their calling. In Christ, the dividing wall of hostility has been torn down and God has used the stones from the walls that once divided us, to construct a holy temple, to make of God’s people a home for God in which the presence and power of the risen Christ now dwells, all in order to invite us in and make us heirs to the promises once made to Israel. Therefore, Paul writes, therefore because this is what God has done for you, live then in this way. (Sarah Henrich)

Or to say it more simply, this is who you are and what God has done for you. This is your calling. Therefore, this is now what your new life in Christ should look like. Do you see the pattern? The second half of the letter will be devoted to laying out what this new life in Christ looks like.

So first let’s think for a moment about what is this “calling” to which Paul refers and upon which he grounds the shape of the whole Christian life? What is it that precedes the “therefore” and is thus the foundation for our new life? Well, as NT Wright suggests, “Paul isn’t referring here to the specific calling or vocation that different Christians have – this one is to be a teacher, that one to run a small business, someone else to be a nurse, and so on. Paul is referring to something deeper and more basic – the calling of the gospel itself. And that is that we have been summoned to - to believe in or to trust in Jesus as the risen Lord and king and to give him complete and undivided allegiance.”¹ That is our calling. At a most basic level that is the promise and the demand of the gospel. This is what Paul means when he begs us to lead a life worthy of our calling. Ground your life in this - believe in Jesus as the risen Lord and king and give your life away to him in complete and undivided allegiance. Lead a life worthy of that calling. If we do it means, therefore, that our lives are going to look very different from the lives of others. It doesn’t mean that we can claim some moral high ground or that we are loved more by God or are somehow better than others. It does imply an expectation that we will live differently because of who we are in Christ. “At every moment, in every decision, with every word and action, we are to be aware that the call to follow Jesus the Messiah, and give him our complete loyalty, takes precedence over everything else.”² That is the kind of life Paul imagines us living on the other side of that one little word – therefore.

Now I don’t know about you but I am still a work in progress and I often wonder how on earth this is possible? Well Paul helps us here by imagining Jesus being much like Moses who you may recall following the Exodus from Egypt ascended to the heights of Mount Sinai and from there

¹ NT Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*. p. 43.

² Ibid.

received the law and then descended delivering the gift of the law to order the lives of God's people.

Jesus, following "...the 'new Exodus' which had been achieved in his death and resurrection, setting us free from the bondage to sin and death, Jesus ascended into heaven where he now reigns as Lord. Only instead of coming down again as Moses had done with the law, Jesus returns in the person of the Holy Spirit showering upon the church different gifts for the equipping of his followers who will now carry on his ministry of reconciling love."³ Truth be told it's not possible with me or with you. This life that we are called to, the life that Paul imagines for us on the other side of that therefore is only possible because God "...is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine."

This is God's work in us, not our own. It's God who enables us to be the people God imagines us being because "...each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Ephesians 3:7) God has so richly gifted the Church in order that we might be the people God dreams of us being. A people that love and forgive like Jesus, a people who embody hope, who cast out demons, who multiply loaves and fishes and feed the hungry masses, who even raise the dead, so that we become a foretaste, a glimpse of heaven on earth. God has so gifted us, filled us with grace therefore the Church can truly be the ongoing incarnation of Christ in the world.

Now quite often we think of the gifts that God has poured out on the Church as talents and abilities and so we value people, even in the Church, based upon the usefulness of their talents and abilities. But what if the gifts God has given to the Church are people? People, given to the body for things the body can't do for its self. Here is how God will carry out the mission of Christ in the world. Here's how God will make possible a life that resembles Jesus on the other side of that one little word therefore...through Christ's people. "To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, in order that we might be mature and grow into the full stature of Christ..." God has gifted us with one another.

You, you are the gifts God has give to the Church and "...some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some shepherds, and some teachers." By these gifts we can live into the therefore of a life that resembles Jesus, the life that Paul will describe in the rest of his letter. This means again that each and every one of you is a gift. It's not that you have gifts or you don't that are then useful for the Church. It's that in God's wisdom God has called you to this place because you are a gift. You are integral to the mission of Christ's Church.

Some of you are like apostles, people who are sent out from this place week in and week out to

³ Ibid. p. 45.

share the love of Christ with others in what you say and what you do. And some of you are prophets. You speak the truth to power in love. You call us to be better than we are. You are a thorn in the flesh of the body of Christ and you won't let us settle. Some among us are evangelists. Good news is always on your lips and you proclaim and live the gospel of life offering hope wherever you go. You are the people of the second chance. Some are shepherds; you care for the sheep both in the fold and out. You help to guide the people of God on their way. You are compassionate, loving, prayerful, supportive friends. You bear the burdens of others, tend to their wounds, and lift up broken hearts and lives. And some of you are teachers. In word and deed we learn what it means to love and serve the Lord by sitting at your feet. You offer us wisdom, and discernment, and lead us to drink from the well of truth. You all are gifts. When we live in unity with one another and value each and every gift, each and every person God sends our way we come close to being a people who can live the Jesus-shaped life Paul describes on the other side of therefore. What happens when we don't? When we expect everyone to be an evangelist or diminish the role of the teacher or the shepherd, or we neglect the role of the apostle we undermine our potential to achieve the fullness of the stature of Christ.

In Christ God has broken down the dividing wall, has made us all one family, heirs together to the promises of God and hearing and believing that God news we have placed our trust in Christ and have offered him our obedient faithfulness as our Lord and king, therefore....

Therefore, lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

God has overcome the dividing wall and made us one in Christ, because God has built us into a holy temple in which God is pleased to dwell, because God is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, because God has filled the Church with an abundance of gifts, with you, therefore we can be the hands, the feet, and the heart of Jesus for the world.

Over the next few Sundays we'll explore a bit more what life looks like on the other side of therefore. This morning I'm reminded that one of the ways we live out the calling of the gospel is by mirroring Jesus' extravagant generosity. And so I want to invite you to join me in entering into covenant with God around how you will practice generosity in the coming year by completing a pledge card and bringing it forward and placing it in one of the baskets here near the stage. If you need a card please raise your hand and an usher will provide you with one. This is not a contract; it is prayerful moment between you and God in which we can say, "God this financial commitment is an expression of my gratitude to you and my desire to live generously towards you and others." So remembering that God is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, come and offer to God your prayers, your service, your gifts for the coming year. Know that God is eager to receive you just as you are.

