

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

Sermon Title: *Remember who you are*

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

I plead with you, then, in the name of our Redeemer, to lead a life worthy of your calling. Treat one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the peace that binds you together. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called into one hope when you were called. There is one Savior, one faith, one baptism, one God and Creator of all, who is over all, who works through all and is within all.

Each of us has received God's grace in the measure in which Christ bestowed it... To some, the gift they were given is that they should be apostles; to some, prophets; to some, evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers. These gifts were given to equip fully the holy ones for the work of service, and to build up the body of Christ – until we all attain unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Only Begotten of God, until we become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Let us then be children no longer, tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine, or by human trickery or crafty, deceitful schemes. Rather, let us speak the truth in love, and grow to the full maturity of Christ, the head. Through Christ, the whole body grows. With the proper functioning of each member, firmly joined together by each supporting ligament, the body builds itself up in love.

Hymnal, 793 – Congregational Commitment

We commit ourselves to follow Jesus Christ,
through whom God has made friends with the world
and in whose name we share the work of reconciliation.

We commit ourselves to the way of the cross,
living a life of simplicity, self-denial, and prayer.

We commit ourselves to love each other,
serving the church, and sharing our time, talents, and possessions.

We commit ourselves to care for the world,
bringing good news to the poor,
setting free the oppressed,
and proclaiming Jesus as Liberator and Lord.

In this commitment we find joy, peace, and new life.

Most parents have different phrases for different situations – different responses for when children say things like, “I’m bored”, or “life’s not fair”, or “everyone else is doing it.” That last one, “everyone else is doing it” – or its various forms, “Dave gets to do it” or “Sarah gets to go” – is a common one, I am sure we have all said or heard. My parents would respond to that statement with one of the following, “if David jumped off a bridge, would you?”, or “David is not my son”, or “Well, maybe you should go and live at David’s house.”

My Grandma had a much longer response to this child accusation, when her children would say “everyone else is doing it”, she would tell them, *that may be okay for everyone else, but it is not okay for you. You are special. You are different. You have a different story. You have a different set of values. You are a follower of Jesus.*

And later, when they were teenagers, this longer narration turned into a shortened phrase. She would simply say to them, each time before they would go out to be with friends or their girlfriend or boyfriend, *Remember who you are.*

Remember who you are.

As we begin this new series on “the church”, that is the phrase that comes to mind, “remember who you are.” In many ways, that is what we try to do each week when we gather here to worship – we gather to consider our Creator, to offer prayers, to read from an ancient book, to pray for peace, to share our money together, to sing praises to someone other than ourselves – we are trying to remember who we are. And while we do this every Sunday, in this

series on the church, this is the hope of this series, to help us more overtly, “remember who we are.”

We live in an increasingly rootless world – we move around more and more – only a small group of us here grew-up in Idaho, and even fewer whose parents or grandparents grew-up in Idaho. Increasingly, in our rootless world where many are seeking meaning, purpose, and tradition, it is quite a counter-cultural thing to claim a story, to say, that part of how I understand myself and the world around me is by looking the truths of this story that is thousands of years old; it is quite counter-cultural to base our lives on the actions and words of a Jew from Nazareth.

To guide us and give us structure for the rest of this sermon, I want to ask you all to turn in the back of your Hymnals to **793**. Mennonites have historically been slow to write creeds and statements of faith, we are more likely to talk about how we want to live or the types of things we want to commit ourselves to, than to articulate a formulaic statement of faith or creed. In that light, we will use this congregational commitment to guide the rest of our time together. I will invite you all to read a paragraph of this commitment together, and then I will say a few words about that. Then, we will read the next paragraph, I will say a few words, and so on. Please join me in the first paragraph as we remember who we are.

Hymnal 793

**We commit ourselves to follow Jesus Christ,
Through whom God has made friends with the world**

and in whose name we share the work of reconciliation.

Remember who you are, those who commit ourselves to follow Jesus Christ.

The Church, I read this week, should not be concerned with belief or unbelief – it should not spend time trying to convince people to believe in God – rather, we should concern ourselves with the TYPE OF BELIEF. We all believe in something, in some system – at some point in life we accept a system of belief, that way we do not have to stop all the time to puzzle over each life decision. For most of us, some time in young adulthood we accept a worldview to guide us in most of our life matters. Most have come to believe in Capitalism, in Democracy, in some form of Technological power, in Military might. And so the question is not “belief or unbelief”, but “what type of god do we believe in” and “what system of belief guides us?” This is the concern of scripture: what type of God created the world, what type of God exists, what type of God do we worship? This is the question, for which we say, Jesus is the answer.

What type of God exists? For that answer, we turn to the God we meet in Jesus Christ.

Who is the God of the Bible? For that answer, we look through the lens of Jesus the Christ.

We are called to base our lives and actions on a Jew from Nazareth. Our claim is not that this tradition will make sense to anyone else, or will make our lives free from pain, or even that such a view will enable the world to run more smoothly. Our claim is that we believe it to be true (Or, at least on our best days, we believe it to be true). Our claim is that the way of Jesus, this really is the way that God is, that this ancient story really does tell us about the way God has ordered

the world to function best. This is, I think, at the most foundational level, who we are as a people of faith.

**We commit ourselves to the way of the cross,
living a life of simplicity, self-denial, and prayer.**

Remember who you are, those who commit ourselves to the way of the cross.

The way of the cross is discussed a lot in American Christianity, but it is no small thing. The way of the cross is not a rational way of thinking or being in the world. It is not even part of our evolutionary brain – our reptilian brain that calls for “fight or flight” is not the way of the cross – the way of the cross says that we continue on working for love and justice, even if it might cost us our life.

Nothing in the Sermon on the Mount suggests that the way of disciples is “rational.” Jesus honestly admits that his way goes against everything we have heard said, everything that comes naturally or rationally. “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you.” People who walk down this narrow way will be accused by others of being fanatical, irrational, or extreme, because they have given over their individual claims of reasonableness, independence, and goodness in their attempts to be obedient to God.

This is why we exist as a church, because it is too hard to follow Jesus on our own. Duke professor Stanley Hauerwas says that, “we need the church because following the way of Jesus is too hard on our own, we will never make alone.” This is part of why we are here together,

because we believe it is too hard to follow Jesus alone – we need a group of people, we need religion – to keep doing it. In our time, many of us know that the fastest growing denomination/ religion in North America is the “Nones” – those who want to be spiritual but not religious. The church says that this is good in theory, but the way of Jesus is simply too hard to go it alone. We need the support of others who are also trying to follow behind Jesus, those trying to follow the way of cross.

And we know that this way will not make sense to those who tell a different story or who have a different worldview. When we started talking about the possibility of going to Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams, the common response we got to people was caution and confusion – why would we want to spend a couple of weeks in Iraq. This was the response from our families as well, as it should have been, they were scared for us – worried about our safety and wanting to suggest alternative possibilities. And I remember the first time I really started freaking out a bit about going on the trip, the time I started to get pretty nervous, Jim Max came up to me after church and was so excited for us, he said, “I wish I could go with you guys – that is going to be such an amazing trip.” Jim’s enthusiasm lifted me up at that time, it helped me remember why I would make such a decision; it helped me remember that not everyone thought this was crazy.

For people who have a different worldview, who tell a different story, such a decision is crazy. But for those who seek to follow the way of the cross, things look differently. And we need the support of others who look through the same lens.

We commit ourselves to love each other,

**serving the church,
and sharing our time, talents, and possessions**

Remember who you are, those who commit ourselves to love each other.

Notice here that we do not commit to always agreeing, that we do not exist to be a people who see everything the same way. But, we do exist to love each other. To care for each other. To think the best of each other.

We will not always agree on what it means to faithfully follow the way of Jesus – we will have different ideas of how we are to use our resources or respond to a particular situation. In those disagreements, we commit to loving each other: to listen deeply to one another, to try to understand the opinion and position of one another, to learn from the perspective of one another. In a culture like ours that increasingly asserts that it is all about the individual, we continue to say that we need each other. In a time when we are increasingly divided and polarized, it is no small thing to commit to listening to someone with a different view, to trying to deeply understand someone who has a different view of faithfulness.

**We commit ourselves to care for the world,
Bringing good news to the poor,
setting free the oppressed,
and proclaiming Jesus as Liberator and Lord.**

Remember who you are, those who commit ourselves to care for the world

Jesus told his disciples, “as you go, proclaim the good news, that the kingdom of God has come near.” The kingdom of God has come near. It is often hard to proclaim this, it seems that most of the data out there says otherwise, most of the news is not “good news”, but bad news. Today, September 11th, 2016, is the 15th anniversary of some of the worst news this country has ever had. An event which shaped us and shaped our world – everyone here who is under the age of fifteen has never lived in a world where our country was not at war.

And despite this, despite war, despite a worldwide refugee crisis, despite the treatment of black lives in our country, despite earth’s rising temperatures – we exist to proclaim the good news, that the kingdom of God has come near.

Sometimes I think of this little group of people here as the people of Jesus who testify, amid all of the contracting data, that our situation is not hopeless. Who do not believe the problems are too complex, the corporations too big, the resources too scarce – that despite the data that tells us otherwise, we still live by hope. And when we as individuals lose hope, we rely on each other to remind us that our God brings life from death, that we have hope in one who finds a way to bring new life when death seems to be the only possible outcome, that we have a story of resurrection.

The church exists to assert the good news, that the kingdom of God is at hand. We assert the kingdom of God is visible everywhere, where the naked are clothed and the homeless are housed and the hungry fed...everywhere, where elders are honored, and children are taken seriously, and forgiveness is offered....every time we pray for peace or the healing of another, every time we give money away....every time we collect pennies and coins and say, these nickels and dimes can become good news to someone...everywhere, where peace is spoken,

where time is more important than technology, where dignity and love are offered no matter your looks or speech or country of origin...every time when we honor the victims of September 11th by working for peace everywhere, every time we say not only, “God Bless America”, but “God bless All the nations of the world.”

In this commitment we find joy, peace, and new life.

Remember who you are, a people of joy, peace, and new life.

Amen.

Sending Blessing

*And now, as you go from this place, may the God we meet in Jesus Christ go with you –
reminding you of who you are – reminding us of who we are –
that healing and hope might flow through us, and into the world.*

God in peace.

Amen