One Body Built Up in Love Peace Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 4:1-7-11-16 Ordination, Annual Mtg Day

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Forty of us elders, deacons, ministry team leaders and staff gathered last weekend to do some bonding and build some common vision last weekend. After much conversation about commitment, communication, and cooperation, three crucial words for a growing church like Peace, we landed on a simple mantra for the year: Start with why and do all things in love. Medium-sized churches like ours can get very busy figuring out WHAT to do and HOW to do it better. We can consume our energy figuring out WHO will do the work. So all our time is taken up with what are we doing, how are we doing, and who will do it? Important questions, but we often forget to start with WHY.

That discussion last weekend led me to choose the passage in scripture that I think speaks to that truth on this important day, when we are ordaining, installing, and commissioning leaders and welcoming new members too. Ephesians is an excellent piece of encouragement to congregations. This passage starts with our calling, moves to our character, and then to our unity in the one Body of Christ, gifted with grace for the purpose of building up and empowering the saints for the work of ministry. The goal is for all of us to come to maturity in Christ, people who speak the truth in love, and who cooperate together so that each body part promotes growth. Prayer: *May the words of my mouth & the meditations of our hearts, be pleasing in your sight O Lord.*

***Ephesians 4:1-7; 11-16 (NRSVue)* One Body Built Up in Love**

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner 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.

**11**He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, 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 knit 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.

One time, when I was as pregnant as Margaret Elsner, I was praying for a group of church leaders and utilizing this passage in the prayer, I said, “O God, help us to grow to full ma*tern*ity in Christ.” It took me a moment to realize why people were snickering. Full ma*tur*ity in Christ means living “in a manner 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.” Christian maturity means having the mind of Christ, wanting the best for others and being willing to sacrifice for it. That means sacrifice time, sacrifice energy, sacrifice your ideas and perspective for another. I don’t need to tell you how much this maturity is needed in our world full of bullies, not just in schools, but in business and in political office.

A fully mature ministry team will give up time or space for another team’s needs. A fully mature Christian will listen to ideas that challenge your own. The fully mature half of the church who are older will consider that in order to make this a friendly place for families, we must listen to what families say they need. It means we are adaptable and open-minded, careful and encouraging of others. It means not complaining, but finding a good way to communicate the truth in love.

Did you see how many times the word “one” showed up? Somebody under fifteen, please count the number of times. One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. Chapter two was all about the walls between us coming down, so therefore, we are one. One body in Christ means we take our unity seriously. We become each other’s people. Singing: *We are family. I got all my sistas with me.*

With family it doesn’t matter if we like each another or not, whether we agree on politics or social justice issues, we are connected. It is stronger than family in the church. We are united in the Triune God. That’s a unity that nobody can take away, but we can bruise it, damage it by not caring for one another.

If you ask many people what the best attribute of Peace Church is, many people will say something about friendliness and warmth. Friendliness and warmth is important, but the attribute I think it most significant at Peace is our willingness to actually sacrifice our own will to Christ’s. It is our commitment to building one another up in love, which requires some adaptability. There are many right ways to be the church. So we lay aside rigid thinking and we pray openly – help us to be like you O God. J. Pelikan once said, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, and traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.” So hold onto tradition, but never be caught in traditionalism. Tradition is reading scripture in worship. Traditionalism is getting stuck in the King James Version as one generation did. Tradition is having communion. Traditionalism is believing it must be served by elders carrying with silver platters. Tradition is music in worship. Traditionalism is thinking it getting stuck in one style of music or one instrument. Tradition is nurturing the faith of children in the church. Traditionalism is thinking it must happen in weekly age-graded Sunday school classes, like it did in the 1970’s.

Our passage speaks of ligaments. If body ligaments are rigid and tight, they can not just interfere with the working of one joint in the body, but it can make the whole body less functional. When I had frozen shoulders, it affected my arms, my neck, my back. If anyone in the church is rigid of mind and spirit, like a stiff ligament, it slows all of us down.

I return to the opening words of the scripture that if all of us are working together **2**with all humility (not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less) and gentleness (making suggestions rooted in affirming love and respect), with patience (God is not finished with any of us yet) , bearing with one another in love, (love requires forgiveness) **3**making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Then we will indeed be the one body in Christ that we are called to be and we will be true to our name -- Peace.