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Ephesians 4:1-6

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The Mosaic

Did you ever hear the story of the three pastors who tried to walk on water?

There once was a group of three pastors, one Presbyterian, one Methodist, and one Pentecostal and they couldn't stop arguing about who's church tradition was the "correct" one. So they decided to put their theories to the test by invoking a miracle. They found a nearby pond and the Presbyterian pastor went first. She stepped up to the pond and as her people prayed and prayed and prayed for her to cross, she slowly but surely made it to the other side. Next it was the Methodist pastor's turn. As she stepped up to the water her people sang and sang and sang hymns to God and slowly but surely she made it to the other side, too. Finally it was the Pentecostal pastor's turn. She stepped up to the water and as her people prayed and sang and danced before the Lord the pastor tried to start across the water but quickly sank. She got out, and tried again and again with the same result. Meanwhile as the Presbyterian and Methodists pastors watched on the other side of the pond they looked at each other and one said, "I feel kinda bad." "Me too" the other one said, "...maybe we should tell her where the rocks are."

Get it...get it?

I know, I know. But I just couldn't pass the opportunity to share an ecumenical joke with all of you on this special day we get to come together as the many churches of Waterford and worship as The Church. Last year we had our Lenten dinners cancelled only a few weeks in and we weren't able to have last year's Heritage Days or this year's Lenten dinners at all! It was heartbreaking not to worship with our brothers and sisters from other church traditions.

But, oh my goodness, it feels all the more special to celebrate Waterford Heritage Days this year and to worship in the park TOGETHER this year! It truly is a privilege and treat to be able to worship all together at Heritage Days this year! And with that being said, if you see someone who you know is on the Heritage Days committee, please stop and thank them for all their hard work this year, especially with all the rain we've had, and let them know how appreciative we are that we get to worship together again.

I think the Apostle Paul would be so proud and pleased with this gathering. Our scripture lesson today sheds light on Paul's feelings and understanding of the Church and what's most important. His letter to the Church in Ephesus says, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you

were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Why is worshipping together like this important? Because it makes our testimony all the more powerful and God’s love all the more evident when we can gather, not as only Presbyterians, or only Methodists, or only Nazarenes, or Lutherans or Episcopalians or Catholics. No, we come together as Christians. Plain and simple.

It always amazes me that the Apostle Paul had to write these sorts of warnings and teachings all the way back then! I mean, Paul was alive during the same time frame that Jesus walked on earth. It wasn’t too long after Jesus died, was raised to life, and ascended to heaven that Paul was planting and pastoring churches all over the Mediterranean region. But even still, Paul had to write to his churches (from prison by the way) about the importance of peace and unity in the Lord.

Even then, Paul knew that churches easily drift away from the basics and have to be brought back to what matters most.

I’d like to do a quick survey. When you purchase or are gifted a new item – whether it be a car, a new toy, a new phone even, how many of you are the kind of person who likes to sit down and read through the owner’s manual before you put it together or start using it? [raise hands] My grandfather was one of those people. I have a distinct memory of him reading the owner’s manual to his brand new flip phone.

Ok, and how many of you just start using the item and figure it out as you go? [raise hands] This is where I would say I fall. I'm usually the person who starts using whatever new item I have and then when I find myself in a pickle I go back to the owner's manual and try to figure out what's wrong.

Our scripture reading this morning from Ephesians is like Paul reminding the early Church to go back and read the owner's manual because they seem to be in a pickle, of sorts. Even from his prison cell, Paul is hearing and reading reports of the church in Ephesus getting themselves into the pickle of division and argumentation. The beginning of our scripture reading says, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." We don't need to know the specifics of those reports Paul was hearing in prison, but suffice it to say that the early Christians were being the opposite of humble, gentle, patient and loving...otherwise, why would Paul waste ink and paper writing this message down?

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment in all of scripture was, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." That's our owner's manual. Right there. Love God and love others. Seems pretty simple, but even so, we know from history and from our own experience that loving God and loving others is not as simple as it seems – even back in the early church!

We, my Waterford brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to love. Paul's urging to, "live a life worthy of the calling you have received" is for us today just as much as it was for the church in Ephesus. So what does a life worthy of the calling look like? Well, for starters I think it looks like this! [point to everyone] It looks like worshipping God together any chance we can. In the Gospel of John, chapter 4, there's an account of Jesus talking with a woman at a well. She was asking Jesus questions about why her people, the Samaritans worshipped God in a different Holy place than his people, the Jews. But Jesus responded to her question by saying "a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." Worshipping together in Spirit and in truth is what living the life worthy of the calling looks like.

It also looks like working together. The chances when we get to work side by side at places like the Waterford food pantry or during the pandemic when the Presbyterian church invited us to their parking lot for drive thru communion – those moments of working side by side are chances to join our efforts and forces together to continue building God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Even though we do get some chances to work together, I wonder how else we can be joining forces and joining hands to do the work of God in Waterford. If God Holy Spirit gives you an idea of how our we can be a light in the darkness here in Waterford, I beg you to share your idea with your pastor – I know any of

us would be glad to get some new ideas and work with each other to shine the light of Jesus together.

And lastly, living a life worthy of the calling looks like praying for one another. Do you pray for the other churches of Waterford? I know that it's easy for me to pray for other Methodist pastors and congregations because I get newsletters and updates from our Erie district and Western PA conference, but I have to admit that I don't do as much praying as I should for the other churches right down the street from me. Do you pray for them? Do you pray that they would have strength to continue through the residual effects of the pandemic? Do you pray for the pastors of those churches to be courageous and healthy leaders? Do you pray for the lay people of those churches to have unity and peace? Do you pray for the congregations to grow in number so that more and more people might come to know the love of Jesus?

Friends, we have an enemy and it is not the church down the street. Our enemy so wants us to think that it's the church down the street, but that's just not true!

In closing, I invite you to take your bulletin and look at the front picture. On it you'll see a picture of a cross – the most precious symbol we have as Christians. The symbol of how Jesus sacrificed his life for our sins and the symbol of how through our death to ourselves, we find resurrection in him because he conquered death. But as you look at the cross, there are many different shapes and sizes of these beautiful broken pieces of things. Each of

them on their own are pretty unimpressive, right? Imagine that each denomination or each church tradition represented here and around the world makes is a separate piece. When the many denominations and traditions are brought together, they complement each other and form a beautiful work of art. The Church is the most beautiful work of art that God has ever created. People – ordinary human beings like me and you – have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and called to work WITH GOD in the world to worship and work together and pray for one another. What a calling that is! Amen?

Let's pray –

Tim Tennent Benediction

Let us not believe too small or be found with tiny prayers or stunted faith. Let us walk boldly into the world that God has given to us. Let's not waste five minutes lamenting the world or it's losses. That's what the world is. Let's get on being victors with Christ and bringing his redemption to the world.