

Resurrecting Church: Better Together

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Big Idea: We are called to walk worthy of God's call

Purpose: To motivate people towards doing the work of God

Passage: Ephesians 4: 1-16 NLT

Hi everyone, I'm Denise Douglas, one of the Pastors here at New Hope. We are half way through our series: Resurrecting Church. In a time of division, the New Testament book of Ephesians is both a word of direction and one of incredible hope for the church. Chapters 1-3 are an inspiring exploration into who God is, who Jesus is – the Well-spring, the Head of the church, both our Source of Life and our Leader. Let's review some of Paul's statements in these chapters:

- Even before (God) made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ...
- God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure.
- God is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave us our sins. He has showered His kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

In the middle of these statements, Paul bursts out in prayer for the church:

- I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope He has given to those He called...
- I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe – it is the same mighty power that raised Jesus from the dead.

That prayer is in chapter one and he prays these snippets in chapter three:

- ...may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is.
- May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Here is a description of Ephesians I resonate with: *"It is pure music...What we read here is truth that sings, doctrine set to music."* These chapters make me want to dance with abandon— Don't worry, I won't—but really, don't you feel the incredibleness, the lavishness of these words? These first chapters nurture, prepare, and inspire us for what the next 3 chapters call us to live out.

Paul now pivots in his letter. He has helped his readers get a big-picture view of God and gain some understanding of the power and infinite love we have as children of God. Now he is going to tie those truths in to daily living as the body of Christ. I invite you to turn or scroll to Ephesians 4: 1-16. Ron Gulberg, the Chair of our Elder Board, will read the scripture passage for us.

Therefore, I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say,

*"When he ascended to the heights,
he led a crowd of captives
and gave gifts to his people."*

Notice that it says "he ascended." This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

(Ephesians 4:1-16)

Healthy and growing and full of love. Wouldn't it be great if the church, if our church, New Hope, was described this way? If someone asked one of our neighbors, "So, what is that church on the corner really like?" and they could respond, "Well, I don't know everything about them yet, but they seem healthy - they are kind, welcoming, they are growing - open to learning, and they are full of love - they consistently interact with and serve others in our community."

Maybe you noticed that this chapter starts off with the word, "Therefore." You probably know anytime we see that word it means that what the writer is about to say is predicated on what has already been said. In other words, because of everything Paul has said up to this point— that we have been blessed with all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms, because we have forgiveness and redemption through God's incredible grace and

kindness, because we have an inheritance sealed with God's own Spirit, because we are no longer strangers, foreigners, but saints in God's kingdom, because all of that is true— *THEREFORE* - lead a life worthy of your calling.

If you are wondering, "Well, what does that look like?" you are in luck because Paul tells us. In the upside-down kingdom of God, where a Rabbi, a teacher, God himself, bends down and washes dirty feet, living worthy of our call doesn't look like elitism, or privilege. Paul says it looks like humility, gentleness, and patience with people's faults.

It is easy to think I'm patient when I am by myself. When it is just me, talking to Jesus, reading the word, I can feel holy, like all is right with the world, and right with me. Then my husband walks in brings up a topic of conflict, or I walk in the door at church and am met with an ideology different from my own. Humility, gentleness and patience aren't always what rises to the top.

Paul says walking worthy looks like making *EVERY* effort. There is work involved in community and relationships. It doesn't necessarily come easily. This work we are called to revolves around keeping ourselves united and bound together with peace.

One of the things that impressed me about New Hope's staff as I began to work with them was their "every effort" to live by their stated values. I don't know who decided on these— I'm assuming John led this effort— but the commitment is to interact with each other with *Joy, Humility, Vulnerability, Collaboration, Creativity* and *Excellence*. There is an effort to believe the best of each other even when we don't fully understand each other.

Eugene Petersen calls this *Practicing Resurrection*. Practicing what we believe. Walking out our new life in Christ is what Paul talks about in these next 3 chapters. Let me offer some insight from Eugene Peterson's study into the word *worthy* in that first sentence.

The Greek word that we translate *worthy*, is the word *Axios*.

There is word picture here; important because this is concept upon which the whole letter revolves. This is axis.

An *axios* is a set of balancing scales, with cross beams balanced on a post, forming an axis, with pans suspended on each end of the beam. In one of the pans you place something whose weight you already know- such as one pound of flour. Then you take the unknown weight of say a container of sugar and place it in the other pan. It goes down if it's too heavy or up if it's too light. When the pans balance evenly, the two items are said to be *axios*—*worthy*. They are in balance with each other.



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Paul begs the church, to make worthy, to bring into balance two things: God's calling and our living. **When God's call and the way we live are in balance, we are healthy, growing and full of love.**

As I was working on this message, I was watching a friend, praying with a friend struggling with a call she had received to take on a new role. It would not have been much of a

struggle— would have been a fairly easy, “*thanks, but no thanks*” if it weren’t for the respect she had for the caliber of those who were asking. Who is doing the “ask” always matters doesn’t it?

The call on the church is not from Paul, not from Peter, or any apostle, but from our very Creator, Savior, and Redeemer, who fills the universe with His presence, and says *you are My body on earth— you are My plan, you are My ambassadors*. Jesus said, by your lives, specifically by your love for each other, the world will know that you are Mine and that God has sent Me. Is that the conclusion the world makes today by watching the church?

The Bible is honest about how often God’s people lose the worthiness, the *axios*, between God’s call and living it out. It was out of balance when Adam and Eve believed faulty, half-truths, “fake news”, and out of that fake news went against God’s call. But here is what I want us to hear: *God called again*. He immediately began a process of getting them back in relationship, back to a living space that would be worthy with His call on their lives.

We know the heroes of the faith, Abraham, Moses, David, didn’t always remain worthy with God’s call. The Bible doesn’t paint that false picture; it does paint the picture of a God who walks alongside people of faith in the messy middle of life, and consistently helps us time and again regain the balance, the living worthy of God’s call.

Jesus on the shores of Galilee began to call his disciples by name. Peter, Andrew, James and John. How many of you are watching ***The Chosen***? I love seeing the personalities of the disciples come to life on screen. They are so human—which they were and which we are—prone to wonderful acts of passion for God and sometimes breaking relationship with each other. Jesus kept calling until there were 12 in that close, intimate circle, and those 12 had no idea what the next 3 years would hold. If this last year has taught us anything it’s that we have no idea what our next 3 years will hold!

The disciples stepped into the journey walking the dusty roads of Galilee, listening, obeying, questioning, jockeying for position; Jesus teaching them each step of the way. He kept pulling them closer, and called them to something higher and something deeper. Not to positions of power, but to getting on their knees in acts of service and love to each other. He also called them to take up their cross, that symbol of death and dying, and follow Him. He called them to live out their faith with each other and therefore to be witness to the world of love and maturity, worthy of God’s call.

God’s call is personal, but it is also inter-personal. This is a letter to a church, to a faith community, not to a bunch of individuals. The life in which we grow mature is formed in community. To describe the church as a body that functions interdependently was brilliant. You may be a great hand, but if you are disconnected from the arm, you are pretty useless. (Unless you are in a horror movie!) Or if someone has been given the gift of speech, but the tongue is disconnected from a changed heart and a sanctified mind—which readily seems on display today—it’s not a pretty picture. It serves to fracture not heal. A body is not healthy when parts function independently of the other parts. When a spinal injury or a brain injury occurs and the brain can no longer work in tandem with the organs or limbs, we recognize the body is broken. If the body of Christ is disconnected from the head—Jesus—taking direction and obeying the commands we are given—then the church is broken.

Covid, has fractured the church in many ways; separated us and given opportunities for the enemy to sow division. But as God did in the Old Testament, as Jesus did with His disciples, God faithfully calls His people back into balance. To comply with the Spirit, to get healthy, we have to exercise what Paul calls for here: *humility, gentleness and patience*. That is to be our posture.

Verses 7-11 look at the fact that Jesus, after descending to be with us as a human being, ascending into heaven, filling the entire universe with himself, generously, or as chapter one reminds us, lavishly gave gifts to the church. There are around 20 gifts listed through the New Testament, but here Paul mentions the leadership gifts - *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*. They have a specific responsibility in the body of Christ. To equip God's people to do the work of God.

In other words, we know this: **Church is not to be a spectator sport.** *Spiritual couch potato* is not a thing. It is not listed among the 20 gifts that Jesus handed out. And we all have gifts. You know one of the best ways to discover your gifting? It really isn't through a spiritual gift test— those have their place, don't get me wrong—but as you simply serve and get involved, your gift set will be recognized, identified by the body of Christ and through your own discernment.

My husband, Fred, and I got married in our 30's. I had been on staff at a church in Tigard for six years, the second church I had served in after college. Fred was living in Seattle, Edmonds, actually, working with Youth For Christ. After our wedding—right here in this church—I moved to Edmonds. For the first time in 9 years I walked into church, brand new, not on staff, no one knew my name, no one knew my gift set. It was so good for me to learn how intimidating and daunting it is to step in where it seemed like everybody knew each other, had their place, and now I had to figure out how and where I fit.

Here is a fun side note—Chelsea Hostetler's parents, Mike and Cyndy, were part of that church and were some of the kindest, most welcoming of the bunch. I was grateful for friendly people! If you are new to NH, welcome! In some ways, I guess we are all new to this body because it is the *New New Hope*. Maybe we are all wondering a bit, "*Where do I fit?*" After that Edmonds experience I've had more compassion for the *new kid on the block* no matter what their age.

In reality, it is going to take time—after Covid restrictions, after moving out of a building, after walking into a foreign place, or welcoming in a crowd of strangers— it will take time before we are functioning well as a local representation of the body of Christ again. But we will get there. God will see to it. Those entrusted to lead New Hope take that responsibility seriously. There is hard work going on behind the scenes to equip New Hope to be a healthy, growing community doing the work of God.

Don't get me wrong, God's work never stopped during Covid, the merger itself is testimony of that. The church didn't cease to exist, but being separated for that long, being dis-embodied, some of our 'community muscles' have atrophied. As we start exercising our gifts, we will regain strength and momentum. We've mentioned that our Board of Elders recently went on retreat, and last week, our Strategic Leadership Team went on retreat, working through who we are called to be as "church" and what it means for us to walk worthy, in balance, in step with God's call.

We don't want to be a sickly, anemic body, rife with division, but one that is healthy, growing and full of love. We believe God has some heavy lifting for us to do going forward. Our world is in great need of the Good News. The Church is not just Sunday mornings at 9:15 and 11:00, is it? That is when the church gathers for worship, teaching, and inspiration, and it is great to be regathered, but the church is a living, breathing, acting representation of Christ on earth. What we do in the gathering is important—more important is how we treat each other. That is our witness. We are still church Monday-Saturday as well. Maybe we need a banner above our exit doors that says, "*The church has left the building.*"

As leaders who are responsible to equip the body for the work of God, we will be putting forth a call for you to step in and begin exercising—to volunteer in places where the church needs you, both in our gathering moments and in the community. BUT—maybe you are ready today. Don't wait on a formal ask— contact a staff person. I know LeRoy needs to rebuild Kid's Community Volunteers. Emily and I are looking for volunteers with our Justice Partners, organizations/ministries partnering with God to make wrongs right in this world.

Let me tell you about an opportunity we have been invited into. The reality is our oncebeautiful city feels a bit like a trash heap in some areas. The City, in conjunction with the Palau Organization, has asked the faith community to clean up trash on June 26th - New Hope will be one of ten drop sites for this clean-up event. Trash pickup isn't your gift? It's not about the trash, it is about saying to the community '*we care about you and the spaces we share.*' It's about building relationship and bridges.

Ephesians 1-3 reassures us that God has poured out on the church all that we need to walk worthy of His call in this moment in history. No, this world is not our home, but for now we are on assignment. This is no time to throw in the towel. We are asked to work and have our work marked differently by being humble, gentle, and patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults. Don't you imagine Paul, this hard-charging Phariseeturnedevangelist had a few faults people had to be patient with? Barnabas and Mark could probably name a few.

We are immature to think making allowances for faults is a one-way deal. Why do we make those allowances? Paul says it's because of love. If you struggle to love others—and who doesn't at times, right? —go back and soak in Ephesians 3 again and again. Get reacquainted with how deeply you are loved. You don't have to hide your faults. God sees them and makes allowances for them as He asks us to do for others. Church, this is an invitation to journey toward maturity, peace and unity— sounds like a pretty good destination. We must be on that path in order to be worthy of God's call. Then, Paul says, we will *no longer be immature like children*, instead, according to verse 15, *we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ the head* - the life source and leader of His body, the church.

Can I put forth a charge today? As we are coming back and reforming church that we will consistently pursue *walking worthy*, in balance with God's Call in this book?

What does that look like specifically for you? For me? Let's invite the Holy Spirit to examine our practice, our living-out of life in community. Maybe it looks like the Spirit

asking you to kneel more often, both in prayer and in attitude, releasing the need to have things go your way, or 'the way it's always been.' Maybe it looks like the Spirit asking you to live according to a set of biblical values in your interpersonal relationships with joy, honesty, kindness, humility. Maybe it looks like....Let the Holy Spirit fill in the blank.

Church this is such a perfect time for a "reset." We are grateful for the regathering church. We are grateful for a merger that brings us together, strengthening us, enabling us to be better stewards of God's resources. My hunch is that God wants to call us to a higher and deeper work together.

The table of the lamb is one of the ways God restores balance, inviting us again and again. Here we are reminded: the way of Jesus is to lay down our lives in obedience that new life can be birthed.

Benediction:

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever. Amen. Go in peace.