

## Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to 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. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

### Building Each Other Up...In Love

I like that video, "For the Birds." What when we snub others because of the way they look or the way they act? As a pastor, this reminds me of the words that the psalmist wrote, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (Ps.118:22). The video depicts the kind of scene that you'd imagine in an elementary school where one child is shunned because of the way he looks, the way she dresses, the way she talks, the way he laughs *or the things he says*. We think that we outgrow this kind of behavior, but many people never really do outgrow it. We still shun people who don't think or act or speak or look like us. Sadly it is our tendency to exclude others that forces us to make laws to curb the amount of exclusion that occurs – early last week Hyesun and I went to visit a friend out in the Hamptons who belongs to a private beach club, and she explained how she had to be interviewed and vetted in order to be invited to pay a lot of money to join this club. We can't prevent exclusion from happening, and sadly in our world inclusion seems to be the exception more than the rule.

And by definition, love and unity demand inclusion. And love and unity are the two things that Paul pleads for in today's reading; Paul begs the Church to lead a life worthy of our calling, a calling to live our lives in Christ, lives that abound in love and are marked by unity – not uniformity; we're not trying to look and act all the same like those rude birds in the cartoon. But unity in following Jesus. Too many Christians think that being a Christian is about nothing more than belief in set of doctrines, and that belief in those doctrines save us from death or hell or something bad that occurs after we die, but it's not about a doctrine but rather the life that we live, and it's **not** about the life we live as individuals: *it's about our life together*; I can do many things for people – feed them, clothe them, advocate for them, but if all of my good deeds are done with the intention of making me look good before God then none of those deeds were done with a heart of love. None of those deeds were done with the intent of extending God's kingdom in this world; they were done with an interest in securing my place in the kingdom, but they were done in love. They weren't done with a heart of love that invites others to enter into that kingdom, a kingdom defined by love.

Paul begs the church to bear with one another in love because he understood that Christians are new creations in Christ and therefore we are reflections of Christ, and the world watches us. What was true then is true today; everyone who comes into this church is observing what we are like as a church. Are we united in pursuing God's will

or are we divided? Are we like those birds that peck at the talons of the misfits among us, or do we make room for everyone on that phone line? Paul calls us to be humble, to be gentle, and to be patient with one another. Are those the first three adjectives that people use to describe you? Do you cause other people's blood pressure to go up when you walk in the room, or do you put them at ease and make them feel relaxed and comfortable? Do you make deadlines in your head for when a person should conform to your expectations, or do you bear with them on their journey of faith, even when it's not convenient for you to do so? Do you look for ways that will help them grow or do you wait impatiently for them to meet your standards? Are your prayers more about asking God to change other people, or do you pray that God would bring about a change within you that will help you better respond to the needs of others? People who are coming to church looking for answers are looking at you to see if your life bears witness to those answers.

And of course people are observing you outside the church as well. Some people are completely different people when they're not in church, as if this is the only place where their behavior matters – "I can be rude and impatient when I'm not in church because no one outside church knows that I'm a Christian." But ultimately it is more important that you are humble and gentle and patient outside of church because it's the people outside of the church that need people who will build them up in love, who will defend them against injustice and bigotry, and it's people outside the church who need to be shown how to love the stranger rather than fearing or rejecting the stranger. ***We bear witness to God's love in humble, gentle, and patient way that we deal with others...ALL others.***

It's a tall order, but that's what we were created for, or rather, that's what we have been re-created for. We are new creations in Christ, born of the Holy Spirit to witness to God's reign on earth as it is in heaven, at it all starts in our hearts.

And so I challenge you...no I'm going to be like Paul; I beg you to bear with one another in love. Be humble enough to know that you're not always right, that you don't have all the answers, that someone else might have a better idea than you do, that you might have made a mistake. Be gentle with others; think about what you say and how your words may affect someone before you open your mouth. Will my words push people away and cause them to avoid me? Are my words intended to put this persons down, to shame them or ridicule them? And be patient with others. Some people may never change, but God may place such people in the church or in your life in order for you to build up your level of tolerance, to teach you to better understand how others feel and what they go through. One of the greatest testimonies of God's love and God's grace is the openness of the Church, how *everyone* is welcomed. There may be some who you wish would not come to church, but there may be some who wish that you would not come to church, but we are here to work on our love, to bear with one another in love, and come to accept one another in love.