

Ephesians 4:1-16

Intro

Why did you come to church today?

- because you wanted to learn something
- see friends
- maybe haven't been for a few weeks
- maybe you just like church
- it's what you always do
- you have to go to church
- feel guilty if you don't
- maybe it was to check out the new bishop.

Why did you come to church today? Our passage today addresses this very issue.

The passage set for today is Eph 4:7-16, but let me put it in context for you.

1. Worthy lives

Read 4:1

This verse acts as the heading for this passage. In this verse P is urging them to live in a way that is worthy of the calling they had received, which from Ch 1-2, is a way of describing God choosing them and saving them into his family.

What follows in the rest of this passage (and indeed the rest of Eph) is how they and we are to live a life worthy of our calling.

2. Unity in relationships

And first thing he talks about is unity.

Read Eph 4:3-6

Now in the previous chapters, Paul has explained how Jews and Gentiles are one together in Christ. There is no separation between the two. So in v4, there is only one body and one Spirit and so forth. That is, spiritually they share everything.

All Christians, all people in Christ, are one already through Jesus.. And that's why in v3 it says to make every effort to **keep the unity** that all XNS already have.

So how can we keep the unity we already have, when we're all so different?...

Verse 2 talks about being humble and gentle and patient and bearing with one another in love. IOW its about unity in relationships.

Let's be honest, amongst XNS there are some people that are quite simplyannoying, who get on your nerves, people you just can't stand. There are stubborn people, pushy people, cranky people, selfish people, disagreeable people... let's face it, there are just some downright unlovable prickly people out there... maybe even in here. They may be standing out the front.....they may even be sitting in your seat.

What do we do with them?

Avoid them, ignore them, get rid of them. That'd be nice.

No! We are to be humble and patient and gentle and bear with them in love.

Now did you notice that this passage actually *assumes* that within the body of Christ there are people who you dislike or different or difficult. If there weren't then wouldn't need to be patient or put up with people. That's why it says, "make every effort". What the bible is telling us here, is that where unity is concerned, it is not the differences that are the main concern, it is the way we handle them.

Unity is achieved not by sameness but how we treat each other. Passage goes on to talk about another important aspect of how unity is achieved and it's by serving each other. And serving each other starts with Jesus.

3. Unity through service Jesus the giver of gifts

....read v7.

Jesus is the one who gives and distributes grace, which here refers to the gifts and abilities needed in the life of the body or the Church. He gives to each one and he gives different gifts to different people.

Now v8-10 explains why Jesus has the authority to give gifts. V8 refers to an OT verse (Psalm 68:18) about the triumphant Lord – who like any triumphant king, has the authority to distribute his wealth. It draws on the picture of a conquering king returning from battle and handing out his plunder to his people as he sees fit to do. V9-10 tell us that Jesus is that Lord because he ascended to the right hand of God in heaven, having first descended to the lower parts of the earth. Here it's referring to Jesus coming to earth as a man, but further descending into the death that paid for our sins. But now having ascended as the triumphant king, Jesus has the authority to give gifts,

And so he does.....**Read v11**

4. The gifts given

Here we see some of the gifts that Jesus gives out, not all of them, but some of them – apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers...These people are Jesus gifts to the church.

IOW, your pastor/teacher, is God's gift to you! Pete is God's gift to you. Now you might ask if God has a return policy, but remember God only gives good gifts, so be careful how you treat your pastor.

Now these particular gifts are mentioned here because they have a particular function in the body of Christ....that being **v12a....to prepare God's people for works of service....**

5. The purpose of the gifts

That is, their job, is to prepare God's people...YOU...for works of service. Pete's job is to prepare you for works of service. You may think it's to serve you, but it's not, it's to prepare you to serve.

Now **why are God's people to do works of service? ...read v12b-13**

So the purpose of God's people doing works of service is the build up the body of Christ (=church). The way that the body of Christ is built up is through works of service. When XNS serve each other it builds the body of Christ up.

And what are we building towards....read v13

The body of Christ is building towards a unity in faith, knowledge and maturity to the measure of the stature of Christ (or the perfection of Christ). That is, reaching a maturity that is like that of Christ. Unity in maturity is the goal of our building work, which is the purpose of our serving work.

Now, if Christ is the goal to which we are building, as it says in v14, then we won't be tossed back and forth by other teachings that steer us away from Christ. Instead, if Christ is the goal, then as v15 says, we will grow up into him. And Jesus is, of course, the head of the body and it is, v16, from him the whole body is joined and held together.

Read v15-16

And notice, v16 again, that the body grows and builds itself up as EACH PART does it's work.

And that in essence is the point of you being here today. That's the point of you being in this church family. That's why you come to church. To do your works of service so that this body may be build up until we all reach maturity together.

Works of service or serving each other is not just for some of God's people. It's not even for most of God's people. It is for all of God's people. There is a role to play for everyone of us and the challenge for us is to jump in and do it.

And so the big question for each of you today, and every time you meet with God's people, is what service are you doing to build up the body so that we might reach unity in maturity?

AndNot talking simply about rosters....though that's included. Even if you're not rostered on for morning tea or kids church or music or Bible reading or preaching or welcoming or whatever, it doesn't mean you're not here to serve.

Serving is doing whatever builds God's people.

How? Serving can be as simple and significant is asking someone "How are you? And really meaning it and hanging around long enough to really listen to the answer."

It can be...looking for new people, and sitting with them (even if it means moving from your favoured position) and introducing them around, even if you feel nervous doing that.

It is for everyone, every week, and every time we meet big or small groups, every conversation...looking for someone you can encourage – encourage as a Christian in their life. That builds people up. It something we should all do. Each conversation you finish today...should turn us to, who can I encourage now.

And serving is not just on Sundays...it may be inviting someone over for dinner, it may be looking after someone's kids so they can grab a cup of tea, maybe shopping for an elderly person or someone who's sick...it may be praying!!! There are thousands of ways everyone can serve. Talk to Peter if you can't think of any way of serving.

You know...sometimes we come to church with a "I'll be served today" mentality. If in those questions I asked at the start about why you came today or what's the point of you being here, and if you did not think "I'm at church today to serve my brothers and sisters in Christ" then even without knowing, you may have an "I'll be served today, thanks very much" mindset.

But understand, you are not here as customers or clients. Every one of you is here to work and serve, every time we gather. If you went and volunteered for a charity – eg serve food to homeless, you wouldn't turn up, have a seat and expect someone to bring you a meal "another serve of fries please"...No! you turn up and say "How can I help?" That should be our attitude to church.

Some people think of Church as a cruise ship. Get on a deck chair and have someone else bring you drinks with umbrellas on them.

This is a row boat. One of those Dragon boat. Everyone has an oar....are you using it? IF you're not rowing, then you're just along for the ride with your foot dangling in the water while everyone else strains and struggles, doing their part and yours. You're dead weight. If you're not a help, you are actually a hindrance. See, there are no passengers. The body can't grow unless every part does it's work. Are you doing yours? And remember, this is what it means to live a life worthy of the calling we have received in the gospel.

So why did you come to church today? Was it to serve? If it wasn't, don't despair. There's still time.