



Sermon Transcript October 20, 2019

We Believe! It Takes a Church Ephesians 4:1-16

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on October 20, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text

Ephesians 4:1-16

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge 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 eager 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 that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

⁸ Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” ⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

EFCA Doctrinal Statement

The Church: We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

Introduction

This past year, Al Mohler preached a sermon where he coined the phrase, “It takes a church to raise a Christian.”¹ The focus of his sermon had to do with raising children in the church. In the sermon, he shared how Christian parents will often say to him, “I don’t know how in the world we’re supposed to raise children in a time like this.” I’m currently reading a book titled *Faith for Exiles*. It is a book that talks about how to help the emerging generation follow Jesus while living in the midst of this digital age. Richard Freed observes that “quietly, using screens and phones for entertainment has become the dominant activity of childhood.”² And yet, research has shown that in spite of the promise of being more connected through technology that “loneliness, depression, and anxiety among young people have risen alongside the widespread adoption of the smartphone.”³ So the question is asked as though we are living in a unique time in human history, “How in the world are we supposed to raise children in a time like this?”

But is the day in which we live really unique? Mohler asks the question, “What do you think it was like for Israel to move their children into Canaan?” It was a place marked by child sacrifice and their practice of idolatry was so sexualized it would make Hollywood look rather tame. Or he asks, “What do you think it was like for a 15 year old Christian boy to walk the streets of first century Rome?” Daily he would walk by cultic prostitution and other things like it right out there in the open. And his point was that the challenge to being a faithful Christian parent and a faithful Christian church is not unique to our time. Quite frankly, there hasn’t been a time where it hasn’t been a challenge. So how do we as a church raise children in the faith?

This is on my mind this morning for two reasons. First, this morning we are baptizing two kids who are currently being raised in the church. It is so encouraging to hear the impact their family and their church family are having on the faith of these young people. It is a real faith that they are expressing this morning. It speaks to the influence a church can have on the life of a young person, even in this digital age.

Secondly, we are in the middle of a sermon series on the doctrinal statement of the EFCA. This morning we happen to be at the part of our doctrinal statement that rehearses what we believe about the church. In our statement of faith about the church we confess that we “are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head.” We are united by faith to Christ and to each other. There is something dynamic—supernatural—about our union together in the body of Christ that you can’t

always explain. But it is real. One of Mohler's conclusions at the end of his sermon is that "we don't believe any real Christianity exists apart from the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁴ So this isn't just about a "church" service you are attending this morning. Rather, we are the church, and through our commitment to Christ and to each other, we can raise a new generation in Christ. But it takes a church to raise a Christian.

I want us to think about the church this morning through the lens of Ephesians 4 and particularly what Paul has to say in verse 3. Here he exhorts us to be "*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.*" This is essential to us being a church that impacts the next generation. So I want to ask three questions this morning. What? Why? How?

Question #1 - What is the unity of the Spirit?

What is "*the unity of the Spirit?*" What is it that Paul says we ought to be "*eager to maintain?*" That is a strong command. In fact, it is the first of a series of commands that describe what it looks like to "*walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.*" The fact that this is the first in a series of commands, conveys the priority of this command. Above all, we are to be "*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.*"

First note that the unity we have is "*of the Spirit.*" This is important for us to understand. We don't create unity. It is the Holy Spirit who creates our unity. How so? It is what we talked about last Sunday when we looked at the Holy Spirit. We saw how it is the work of the Holy Spirit to shine the spotlight onto Jesus through the Word of God and he shines that spotlight personally and powerfully right into our hearts. Though our stories may be different and unique, there is something that unites all of our stories. It is the Holy Spirit who brings us to life and through faith in Jesus makes us part of the body of Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "*For we are all baptized by one Spirit—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*" Through the Holy Spirit you are brought into the family of God—the church.

This is a big issue in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In the first half of the letter, where Paul talks about what God has done for us, he spends a good bit of time talking about how God has made both Jew and Gentile one through Christ. John Stott summarizes Paul's teaching about this unity that the Spirit has created by saying that "this unity is as indestructible as God himself."⁵ That is pretty strong! It is a unity that God has created and so no man or demon can destroy it. We say at weddings, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." This unity that we have in the Spirit is so strong that nothing can "put it asunder." Here is an established fact in Christ. We are one!

Well then, what is up with this command to be “*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit?*” If we are already one, why do we need to be eager to maintain it? What is there for us to “*maintain*” if this unity is as “indestructible as God himself?” Here is the answer. The command is calling us to make visible what is already true about us. It is a command that says to us, “since you are already one in the Spirit, act like it.” Make your oneness and unity visible for all to see. Be true to who you are as a church. You are one, so be one. We give demonstration to our “oneness” when we join and gather together.

One of the conclusions Mohler makes in his sermon is this: “We need the unmarried, the not-yet-married, and the widows and the widowers learning how to be faithful and how to make others faithful. We need younger parents, older parents, grandparents, and about-to-be-parents learning how to be faithful and to help one another be more faithful . . . We remind ourselves that the next generation in our midst are first of all the children of their parents, but they are also our children; we are raising those children together.”⁶ How so? By maintaining a visible demonstration of the unity we already have through the Spirit in Christ.

I remember baptizing a college student a few years ago. After his baptism, I asked him what stood out to him about his baptism. He said that while he was sharing his testimony he couldn’t help but see all the kids who were in the Sunday School class he helped with when he was in high school. I told him how much they look up to him and they were watching him live out his faith. Through his presence, his investment, his learning how to be faithful in the presence of others; he was maintaining the unity of the Spirit and God was using him to impact the next generation.

Question #2 - Why is the unity of the Spirit so important?

This leads us to our second question. Why is maintaining the unity of the Spirit so important? It is because our unity is a reflection of God to others. My favorite definition of the church is that the church is “the presence of Christ on earth.”⁷ Our unity is a reflection of God to others. It is a reflection of God first to those growing up in the church and then to those outside of the church. People ought to be able to get a taste of what God is like by getting a taste of the church.

Look at verses 4-6 and take note how many times the word “*one*” is used. “*There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” There are two things we learn about God through our unity.

First of all, if you look closely at these verses, you can find each member of the Trinity. In verse 4, you find God the Spirit. In verse 5, you find God the Son, that is “*the Lord.*” And then in verse 6, you find God the Father. There is one God made up of three persons. Therefore at the heart of who God is, God is love. God created us and redeemed us to bring us into the love that exists between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Like the Triune God, the church is made up of many members, but one body. So the church is to be the place where we experience the love of God. That is why maintaining our unity is so important. We don’t just talk about God and his love. You can experience God and his love through the love of God’s people.

There is a second reason why our “oneness” is important. Paul says there is “*one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*” Some people think that unity means putting aside all conviction of what is truth. But that is not the case with the church. The unity of the church rests on the unity of the message of Jesus Christ. We are a creedal people. Our unity comes from a belief in Jesus Christ crucified, buried and risen again.

In his book *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton described the effect of the Creed with the image of children playing at the peak of a tall, thin island, with waves crashing on jagged rocks below and the water around it swarming with sharks. The only way the kids can play at the top of that island with freedom is if there is a wall to keep them safe. If that wall is not there, they are afraid because they are free to go anywhere. It is the restriction, the boundary, the barrier, that truly sets them free.⁸ That is what Jesus said in John 8:31-32. “*If you abide in my word . . . you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.*” I can’t think of a better gift to give to an emerging generation growing up in this culture than the experience of God’s love through our love and the knowledge of the truth that will truly set them free. These two kids getting baptized this morning are professing their faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross for their sins. That is why our unity is important. Through our unity they experience the love of God and they come to know the truth that sets them free.

Question #3 - How can I contribute to this display of unity?

So what do we need to do to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit? How can we contribute to the unity of the body so that we can reveal to others what God is like? The answer is in the rest of the passage, starting in verse 7.

Starting in verse 7, we learn that “*grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*” The “*grace*” referred to here in this verse is a reference to

spiritual gifts that each of us has been given. When Jesus ascended to heaven, He ascended as the Victor, and to His people He gave gifts. In verse 11, we see some of those gifts listed: “*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.*” This is a rather narrow category of gifts. They are gifts that represent leadership offices within the church. But notice that these leadership gifts were given, “*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.*”

You have something to offer the body of Christ. It is through your service within the body of Christ that we maintain the unity of the Spirit. Your service reveals what Jesus is like. In verse 9 it says, “*In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?*” The descent of Jesus was so low that he died for us. So it is through our act of serving that we give of ourselves to each other and God uses that. The testimonies you are about to hear are the fruit of many people who have served directly and indirectly in the life of this church.

Conclusion

It takes a church to raise a Christian. For generation after generation that has been the story of WEFC. It continues to be so. Baptism is the ordinance that identifies us with Jesus and the church. These two who are being baptized are not just identifying themselves with Jesus. But they are also identifying themselves with the body of Christ—this local body that has had a big impact on their faith. Communion is the ordinance that demonstrates our ongoing fellowship with the church. Together they remind us of the essential nature of belonging to the church.

So make every effort to maintain the unity that is already ours in the Spirit. Why? Because it is how we demonstrate the love of God and truth of Christ. How do we do maintain unity? We give of ourselves to serve. As a result, more stories are told and a new generation emerges after us. Praise God!

¹Albert Mohler “It Takes A Church” www.thegospelcoalition.org, March 31, 2019

²Richard Freed “The Tech Industry’s Psychological War on Kids” Medium, March 11, 2018

³David Kinnaman & Mark Matlock *Faith for Exiles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019)25

⁴Mohler

⁵John Stott *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979) 152

⁶Mohler

⁷Donald J. MacNair and Esther Meeks *The Practices of a Healthy Church* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1999) Kindle Location 471

⁸David Mills “The Creed We Need” in *Touchstone Magazine*, Vol. 19, No. 5 June 2006, 17

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What do you think are some of the challenges to living in this digital age?
2. What observations do you have of our statement of faith for this week? (see pg. 2)
3. How does your presence in the church have an impact on the next generation? How did the sermon make you more conscious of your role in the church?

Diving Into The Word

4. Read Ephesians 4:1-3. Why do you think it is important to maintain unity in the church? What in these verses are necessary to maintain unity?
5. Why do you think it is challenging to maintain unity in the church? What in verses 1-3 are essential to maintaining unity? Describe the impact on a church when unity is maintained and when it is not maintained.
6. Read Ephesians 4:4-6 and John 17:20-21. How does our unity reveal God to others? What does our unity reflect the nature of God?
7. Read Ephesians 4:7-16. What do you learn about the importance of spiritual gifts in this passage and how do our gifts contribute to the unity of the body of Christ?

Taking It Home

8. Why is the church important and essential to living out our faith?
9. What encouragement did you take from the baptisms this past Sunday?