

Text- Ephesians 4: 1-16

I would like you to please look at your hand. The front, the back, each finger, nails, lines, callouses, whatever. Think about your hand. What do you like about it? What don't you like about it? Are there any particular strengths or skills that your hand has? What does it enable you to do? Are there any ways in particular that your hand has been difficult or painful to you?

Next, I would like you to please look at your knee. For many of you it is covered, so you'll have to remember what it looks like under the clothing. But think about your knee. What do you like about it? What don't you like about it? Are there any particular strengths that your knee has? What does it enable you to do? Are there any particular ways that your knee has been difficult or painful to you?

Consider both your hand and your knee. How do they help you? What would your life be like if you didn't **have** your hand? Your knee? Both hands? Both knees? Both your hands and your knees are gifts to you, gifts from God. Sometimes they may be painful to you. Sometimes they may not do what you want them to, what you expect them to. But they are yours and you are much better off **with** them than

without them. They are yours; parts of you unified as one body.

Now, please look around the sanctuary, not at the walls or the stained glass windows, but at the people, not at their hands or knees, but at them. As you look around, ask yourself what particular strengths do you see among the people here? What do you like about them? Think about these people around you. Like your hands and your knees, **they** are a part of you. You are a part of them. We are all parts of the body of Christ. He is our head. Just as your hands and your knees are gifts to you, gifts from God, so are the people around you gifts from God. At times, they may be very **pleasant** gifts from God. At other times, like your hands or your knees or other body parts, they may be difficult or painful to you. Like your hands or your knees, they may not always do what you want them to. But, you know what? They're still part of you. Just like your hands and your knees, you are much better off **with** them than **without** them. They enable Christ to accomplish things that you could not do without them. They are yours, you are theirs, parts unified and growing together as one body, the body of Christ, the church.

This, basically, is the message that Paul has for the Ephesians here in our epistle text today. He has just

spent three chapters captivating them with all the amazing things that Christ has done for them, many of which we have read over the past three weeks in the epistle lessons. Paul has proclaimed to them that Christ has planned for them to be His even since before the creation of the world, and the apostle **comforts** them with that thought. Christ has saved them by His gracious intervention on the cross and by His glorious resurrection. He is risen! He has made them alive when they were dead. He has given them these amazing gifts in Holy Baptism. And God has given those **same** amazing gifts to you and me today!

Baptism, as we witnessed God do for June/Lennon this morning is the place where God has connected us to one another in His body, the Church. In fact, you're not only connected with your fellow Christians today, but your fellow believers from all times and places, even with those Ephesian Christians to whom Paul first wrote this letter.

St. Paul has so much to teach us about our unity in Christ. Let's take a closer look at today's reading. In verse one, he writes, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." Paul wrote this letter while he was a **prisoner** in Rome. Even though he had his own problems to think about, he was

much more concerned about the church in Ephesus. God used Paul to start that church many years earlier, and now, in prison, Paul writes them this letter of encouragement. He wanted them to live lives worthy of the calling they had received.

In other words Paul wants them live a life of **love**, of **peace**, of **humbleness**, **gentleness**, and **patience**. These are the things that the Spirit will continue to give to **us** as we stay united together in God's Word. If on the other hand, we neglect these things, and don't want to live at peace with one another, to love one another, then the unity of the Spirit will fade away. Paul's deep desire was for them and for all believers everywhere to be **united**.

Here's what that unity looks like: In Verse 2 he says, "Be completely **humble** and **gentle**; be **patient**, bearing with one another in love." That's what unity does. He goes on in the next verse: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Paul wants them to experience peace and oneness. Then he continues: "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." **That's** unity- a group of people who bear with each other in love, a

group of people where there is one hope, one faith, and one Lord and Savior.

I'm pretty sure every church in the world wants to have that kind of unity. But not every church knows how to get there. So many different kinds of people come into the church- different backgrounds, different personalities, different ages, different ideas. How do you unite all these people together? Drinking coffee and juice together during Fellowship time is good. Talking to each other before and after the service is great. Those things help us get to know each other better. But those aren't the things that create **true** unity, the kind of unity Paul is talking about. Something **deeper** needs to be done. The Spirit of God needs to call us together through His Word and keep us united in the one true faith in His Word. That's how true unity in the church takes place.

Let's take a closer look at how God establishes that kind of unity. We'll skip down to verse 11 where Paul writes: "It was He (Jesus) Who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers." All of these people were "Word-of-God-people." These apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers- these were people who shared doctrine, who

taught the Word of God. Through these people, and the Word they share, God unites His church. Verse 12 tells us **why** they shared God's Word: "To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God." Through the work of the Holy Spirit, working through the Word these men were sent to proclaim, the Lord's church was built up and became united. It didn't come from agreeing to disagree. It didn't come from sharing a cup of coffee or juice either. Unity came from learning doctrine, learning the Word of God, focusing on the teachings of the Bible.

That's why the Word of God is so important here First Lutheran - as we read it and hear it and study it together, God uses it to unite us. God's Word unites us together in His truth. God wants us to be united in our understanding of His Word so we can stay close to Him and stay close to one another and share His life-saving love with others.

Whether it's through pastors, teachers, D.C.E's, or volunteers, unity happens when people study God's Word together. As we study it, we find out some things about ourselves... things we **may not** want to know. Look at verse 14: "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back

and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” That’s how we used to be spiritually. Imagine an infant sitting in a little blow-up raft in the middle of a lake on a windy day. There he is, being tossed back and forth by waves, and blown all over the place by the wind. That’s how each one of us used to be spiritually before God taught us His Word, “blown here and there by every wind of teaching.” One minute I believe **this**. The next minute, I believe **that**. That’s lack of spiritual maturity. And it can lead a person into hell.

But God has had mercy upon us. He has brought His Word into our lives. He has taught us the truth about our sin, how each of us has it, and how serious a problem it is. More importantly, He’s also taught us the truth about how He has saved us, how He has taken our sins away, through His Son, Jesus Christ. You know these amazing truths, and many more. And the more you learn the more God matures you and unites you to Himself and to other Christians. Instead of being an infant, we see in verse 15: “speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, that is Christ.” As we have contact

with God’s Word, we grow up in our faith. We become a church full of spiritual grown-ups, and a church that is united by the truth of God’s Word.

God uses **us** to build up His church on earth, as we come together and invite others to gather with us around the Gospel. We come together for worship, for Bible studies, for Sunday School and for other opportunities like Vacation Bible School this past week

Each of us here, no matter how big or small, is an important part of the body of Christ. Like your hands and your knees your fellow Christians are God’s gift to you and you are part of God’s gift to them. We need each other. We are much better off with each other than without each other! God has brought us all together through our Baptism to be His people here at First Lutheran, to support one another and to reach out with His love to all, until at last He guides us into His awesome and eternal presence in heaven! Until then, we are growing together in our faith united by Christ, our head and our Savior! Amen!