

SERMON

Sunday, July 8th, 2018

Ephesians 4: 1-6

“Marking the Path”

Scripture: (1) “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. (2) Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (3) Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit just as you were called to one hope when you were called – (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism; (6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

OPENING

1. A few years ago, Debbie and I went to Hot Springs, Arkansas for a few days of vacation. While we were there, we went to a place called the “Garvan Woodland Gardens.”
2. The gardens were originally owned by the Garvan family. He was an oil tycoon, and they purchased this 210 acres to have seclusion. They loved gardening, so when they died, they turned over their place to the state of Arkansas who has now created one of only 8 public gardens in the country, and the only one near a body of water. At Christmas, they put up over 5 million lights. It has consistently been voted in the top 5 best gardens to see in the US.
3. It has over five miles of trails, unique bridges, waterfalls, a Children's Adventure Garden, and architectural wonder Anthony Chapel wedding complex are some of the highlights.
4. The trees are so tall and so thick that you can't see the sky, and you can't see anything in the distance. It is really beautiful, until you get lost in there. The path makes several circles, and we noticed that we kept tracking back to the same place, and we couldn't figure out how to get back to the top.
5. In their desire to keep things natural, I suppose, there wasn't enough signage to point the way home. We all need markers to orient us, so that we can find our way. It makes a difference when others who have gone before us, who know the way, make the path clear.
6. Paul teaches us today that we are the path.

TRANSITION

Perhaps you remember the words to the Steve Green song we sing here occasionally, titled “Find us Faithful.”

We're pilgrims on the journey
 Of the narrow road
 And those who've gone before us line the way
 Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary
 Their lives a stirring testament to God's
 sustaining grace

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses
 Let us run the race not only for the prize
 But as those who've gone before us
 Let us leave to those behind us
 The heritage of faithfulness passed on through
 godly lives

CHORUS:

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful

May the fire of our devotion light their way
 May the footprints that we leave
 Lead them to believe
 And the lives we live inspire them to obey

Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful

After all our hopes and dreams have come and
 gone
 And our children sift through all we've left
 behind
 May the clues that they discover and the
 memories they uncover
 Become the light that leads them to the road we
 each must find

THE LORD'S PRISONER

1. Verse 1 - "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."
2. He isn't seeking sympathy;
3. Nor trying to guilt or shame the Ephesian people into anything;
4. The Christian walk is worth living, no matter the cost, the consequences.
5. Because we were captured by God first, the prisons of men cannot capture our spirits – walking in Christ, we are free, no matter our circumstances.
 - a. Personal Illustration of a letter to a spiritual son in prison.
 - b. You can be free there, and many people not there are imprisoned;
6. Paul wants them to know too, that He still loves and cares for them, even from prison.

AN URGENT MESSAGE

1. Verse 1 - "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."
2. Paul urges/implores – the word in the original language is *parakaleo* – which means to call to one's side to help or to be helped. It connotes intense feeling and strong desire. There is urgency dripping from Paul's note. This is of high importance. It is the urgent love – not just of a teacher for a student, but of a parent for a child. This is a critical message. Extraordinary selfless and loving;

A WORTHY WALK

1. Verse 1 - "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."
2. Walk refers to the daily conduct of the Christian – day by day living out of our faith. Not just our talk, but our walk.
3. Worthy – the Greek word *axios* – has the meaning of "balancing the scales." What is on one side of the scales has to equal what is on the other side of the scales. For example, if you are worthy of your pay – then you worked diligently to earn your keep.

4. Calling

- a. God's call to salvation – Jesus came to seek and to save the Lost (Lk. 19:10); He calls our name, and we respond when we are saved; This is a high calling (Hebrews 3:1) and a holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9);
- b. Every Christian Receives a call – not just for pastors or the super spiritual.
- c. God's call to follow Him – The faithful, responsive Christian is determined to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). Our good shepherd leads us, walks with us, then follows us (Ps. 23).

5. Are you walking in step with the beat?

- a. BEING – It is transformative – becoming the kind of person God wants you to be from the inside out.
- b. DOING - Notice, this doesn't mean just – are you following Christ where he leads you? That's a part of it. We are to go where he leads us.
- c. Do you know people who just can't dance?
- d. The challenge is to compare/contrast our walk with the high calling of the upward call of Christ Jesus in our lives, then to adjust to meet that call.
- e. The privilege of it is to live lives that please our savior. The privilege of it is the blessings that come when we are faithful.
- f. The responsibility of it is the debt we owe to others who can't find their way.
- g. So, what are the Keys to a Healthy Spiritual walk.

KEYS TO A HEALTHY SPIRITUAL WALK1. Importance of checks –

- a. How do you know if your body is healthy? Check your temperature.
- b. How do you know if your car has enough gas – check your fuel gauge.
- c. How do you know if you are on the right road – you check your map.

2. Five Important Gauges - Here Paul is giving five ways to see if you are in step with the Lord's call. These are five gauges which assess the health of the Christian walk.HUMILITY

1. (2) **Be completely humble** and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (3) Make every effort to keep the unity often Spirit through the bond of peace
2. Meaning – a compound word that literally means to think or judge with lowliness.
3. Paul's Invented Word – the word for humility did not exist either with the Greeks or the Romans. It was a word coined by Christians, and maybe by Paul Himself.
 - a. Anyone in other worlds who did not think of himself with pride and self-satisfaction was considered weak, ignoble, and cowardly.
 - b. After the word for humility was coined – the word was only used outside of Christianity as a word of derision, as a pitiable weakness, not a virtue or strength.
4. A foundational Christian virtue –
 - a. *We are to be like Jesus* – who humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant and taught us to pick up the towel.”
 - b. The first sin was pride, and every sin after that has been in some way an extension of pride.

- c. Pride comes in many forms. We are tempted to be proud of our abilities, our possessions, our education, our social status, our appearance, our power, and even our biblical knowledge or religious accomplishments.
 - d. **I Am Second Foundation** – describes what happens when Christians take up the goal of putting Christ first, and everything else second – “restoration. The world as it was meant to be. People redeemed and lives transformed. Relationships rebuilt, communities revitalized, and culture restored. We seek a world where people become second, serving and loving each other as they put Jesus first.”¹
5. An Elusive Quality – More you focus on it, the more prideful you can become. One you claim it, you forfeit it.
 6. Keep God in View – the only way to defeat pride is to keep a proper view of God. Pride is the sin of competing with God, and humility is submission to His supreme glory.
 7. Humility brings Spiritual Blessing – Every virtue has its roots in humility. James 4:10 – “Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” 1 Peter 5:6 – “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”
 8. Illustration: During the days of slavery in the West Indies, a group of Moravian settlers found it difficult to reach out to the slaves who were almost totally separated from the ruling class. Many of the Moravians proudly felt it beneath them even to speak to a slave. Two young missionaries, however, were determined to reach those oppressed peoples at any cost. In order to fulfill God’s calling they joined the slaves. They worked and lived beside the slaves, becoming totally identified with them – sharing their overwork, their beatings, and their abuse. It is not strange that the two missionaries soon won the hearts of those slaves, many of whom accepted for themselves the God who could move men to such loving selflessness.²

GENTLENESS

1. Scripture - Be completely humble **and gentle**; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
 2. The Definition - Praetor – means strength under control. It was used of wild animals who were tamed. Such an animal still has his strength and spirit, but his will is under the control of his master.
1. Biblical meekness is power under the control of God. – Examples -
 - a. David when he refused to kill King Saul though he had opportunity and just cause (1 Sam. 24: 1-7);
 - b. Jesus – when betrayed by Judas – When Peter (not gentle) drew his sword, Jesus rebuked him, “Do you not think I could appeal to my Father and he would immediately put at my disposal more than 12 legions of angels?(Matthew 26:53).
 - c. Moses was described as “very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). Yet he confronted Pharaoh in the Lord’s name (EX. 5-12), took Israel to task.
 - d. I learned a lesson in meekness once from a Baylor Bear when I was a freshman in college. The bear cages were next to my apartments, and once the handlers were walking the bears. I reached my hand out to pet the bear, as if he were a cat, and the bear pulled his head around gently and gave my leg a gentle bite. Then he looked at me, for a second, and went on.” I knew that there was great power there, but he was gently asking me not to touch him. I complied.
 2. The Path to Meekness
 - a. Watch for it in others, so that you can apply it in your own life. Illustration with Sarah Huckabee Sanders recently – Strength under control not to tweet about being evicted from the Red Hen restaurant. Or when former President Clinton modeled civility by applauding Sanders, despite the disagreements between their political positions.
 - b. When you see it, approve and/or applaud it in others. “That was good!”

¹ <https://www.iamsecond.com/about/>. Accessed July 7th, 2018.

² John McArthur. Walking Worthy of the Gospels (Chicago: Moody Press, 2017), 22.

- c. Give a trusted friend or friends permission to challenge you when they see arrogance, or lack of care for God's agenda.
- d. Daily place your life in God's Yoke.

PATIENCE

1. Scripture - Be completely humble and gentle; **be patient**, bearing with one another in love.
2. Makrothymia literally means long-tempered, and it is sometimes translated longsuffering. It is the quality of enduring negative circumstances without giving into them.
3. Love is patient (1 Corinthians 13). Patience is a fruit of the spirit (Gals 5:22-23);
4. Patience is a multifaceted virtue, because it also involves self-control, and the ability to be self-less, and generosity as well.
5. Types of Patience:
 - a. Enduring nuisance – a person or circumstance of some kind which is irritating, and you would love to complain. But you endure it, because you figure that the person at the office who is insufferable can't always help it, and it doesn't do any good to complain about the potholes.
 - b. Patience through genuine suffering –
 - i. if you are suffering through a disease or a mental illness, then patience is required of you.
 - ii. If you are assisting someone else who is suffering, you are called upon to be patient.
 - c. Sometimes we are asked to be patient with God – to wait on him.
6. Patience is the ability to get outside of yourself. If I am irritated with traffic, or with the slow grocery store line, then my world might be too small. Everyone else has a right to be in traffic, or to get groceries, and maybe the clerk or the waitress has had a difficult day. Impatience often means you are the only thing that matters in your world.
7. Patience is developed through trials. The Stoic philosopher Seneca echoed this theme noting the moral value of adversity:

Pampered bodies grow sluggish through sloth; not work but movement and their own weight exhausts them. Prosperity unbruised cannot endure a single blow, but a man who has been at a constant feud with misfortunes acquires skin calloused by suffering; he yields to no evil and even if he stumbles, carries the fight on his knees.
8. Important to God – Parable of the Good Samaritan.

A FORBEARING LOVE

1. Scripture - Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, **bearing with one another in love**;
2. A Covering – 1 Peter 4:8 – “Love covers a multitude of sins.”
3. A Persevering Love – A love that extends to opponents and enemies; gives for the pleasure of giving, not expecting anything in return; an invincible goodness.
4. Family is important – so we put up with each other and love each other through our own idiosyncrasies.

Illustration – this morning before church, I had an experience with someone, where I wasn't patient, or bearing in love. It wasn't that I made a bad decision. In fact, it was the right one, but it was how I treated the other person that mattered.

UNITY

1. Scripture: (3) **Make every effort** to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace;

- a. “Make every effort” – means to be diligent. The actual word means “to make haste,” as if one were rowing a boat or a canoe as fast as possible, or a predator running from a lion.
 - b. One commenter called this a “Holy Zeal which demands full dedication.”
2. Scripture - (3) Make every effort to keep **the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace**:
- a. Paul is speaking of the inner and universal unity of the Spirit by which every true believer is bound to every other true believer.
 - b. This “unity of the Spirit” is what Jesus earnestly prayed for in the upper room shortly before his betrayal and arrest. – that the church can be one, even as God is one.
 - c. The bond which preserves unity is peace.
3. Less important to be right than it is to be unified. History of the church illustrates this. People fighting over the authority of scripture – defiling the very scripture they fight over by their attitude.

OUR TRAVELING COMPANIONS

1. There is only one, true church – those who have accepted Christ as Savior;
2. We have much more to agree about than to disagree about.
3. We move forward in unison on everything;
4. That unity – isn’t the world’s way, and it reveals Jesus Christ to the world.
5. Illustration: Charles Spurgeon once began a message on the text "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22) with an illustration of three fools.
 - a. *The first fool*, Spurgeon said, is the ship's captain who goes below deck during a ferocious storm to read an encyclopedia on the nature of Atlantic winds rather than fighting to keep his boat afloat.
 - b. *The second fool* is the wounded soldier on the battlefield who asks the arriving medic all kinds of questions about the size, shape, and model of the gun that fired the bullet which wounded the soldier rather than asking the physician if he's able to heal him.
 - c. *The third fool* is the religious person who continually argues the subtle philosophical questions about the origin and nature of evil while ignoring the absolute truth that Christ's blood is able to cleanse his sins (Hebrews 9:14).
 - d. Spurgeon said all three fools have one thing in common: They trifle with subtleties while they ignore certainties.

CONCLUSION

Max Lucado tells the following story. Unfavorable winds blow the ship off course, and when they do, the sailors spot uncharted islands. They see half a dozen mounds rising out of the blue South Seas waters. The captain orders the men to drop anchor and goes ashore. He is a robust man with a barrel chest, full beard, and curious soul.

On the first island he sees nothing but sadness. Underfed children. Tribes in conflict. No farming or food development, no treatment for the sick, and no schools. Just simple, needy people.

The second and following islands reveal more of the same. The captain sighs at what he sees. “This is no life for these people.” But what can he do?

Then he steps onto the last and largest island. The people are healthy and well fed. Irrigation systems nourish their fields, and roads connect the villages. The children have bright eyes and strong bodies. The captain asks the chief for an explanation. How has this island moved so far ahead of the others?

The chief, who is smaller than the captain but every bit his equal in confidence, gives a quick response: “Father Benjamin. He educated us in everything from agriculture to health. He build schools and dug wells.”

The captain asks, “Can you take me to see him?”

The chief nods and signals for two tribesmen to join him. They guide the captain over a jungle ridge to a simple, expansive medical clinic. It is equipped with clean beds and staffed with trained caretakers. They show the captain the shelves of medicine and introduced him to the staff. The captain, though impressed, sees nothing of Father Benjamin. He repeats his request. “I would like to see Father Benjamin. Can you take me to where he lives?”

The three natives look puzzled. They confer among themselves. After several minutes the chief invites, “Follow u to the other side of the island. They walk along the shoreline until they reach a series of fishponds. Canals connect the ponds to the ocean. As the tide rises, fish pass from the ocean into the ponds. The islanders then lower canal gates and trap the fish for harvest.

Again the captain is amazed. He meets fisherman and workers, gatekeepers and net casters. But he sees nothing of Father Benjamin. He wonders if he is making himself clear.

“I don’t see Father Benjamin. Please take me to where he lives. The trio talks alone again. After some discussion the chief offers, “Let’s go up the mountain.” They lead the captain up a steep, narrow path. After many twists and turns the path deposits them in front of a grass-roofed chapel. The voice of the chief is soft and earnest. “He has taught us about God.”

He escorts the captain inside and shows him the altar, a large wooden cross, several rows of benches and Bible.

Is this where Father Benjamin lives?” the captain asks.

The men nod and smile.

“May I talk to him?”

Their faces grow suddenly serious. “Oh, that would be impossible”

Why?

He died many years ago.

The bewildered captain stares at the men. “I asked to see him, and you showed me a clinic, some fish farms, and this chapel. You said nothing of his death.”

“You didn’t ask about his death,” the chief explains. “You asked to see where he lives. We showed you.”³

INVITATION

³ Max Lucado. “Out Live Your Life: You were made to make a difference” (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), xix-xxi.