

Ephesians 4 v 1-17

A Poem about unity!

One finger one thumb keep moving, One finger one thumb keep moving , One finger one thumb keep moving we'll all be jolly and bright !

One finger one thumb one arm keep moving, One finger one thumb one arm keep moving

Etc arm, leg One nod of the head we'll all be jolly and bright....

We are familiar with this song if we have taught children, grandchildren or been subject to long summer holiday trips with the same tape/ cd/ iplayer of children's song being played over again and again!

Why sing it today? To remind us that the main theme of Ephesians Chapter 4 is that we are all one. The writings of Paul emphasise again and again that we are united, just as a body is united in all its parts working together.

We are united by God's grace or as Rowan Williams puts it- 'Paul's disturbing idea of the universal welcome' – we have heard in Galatians the teaching that there is no such thing as being defined as a Jew, Greek, slave or free man, male or female. FOR YOU ARE ALL ONE IN JESUS. (Galatians 3 v 28)

Here Paul is saying that there is something you can belong to- the community of believers, in which all these kinds of status are immaterial.

We see in the life of Jesus, his refusal to accept that in order to belong to the people of God qualifications, ethnic or legal or social

matter. 'Jesus extends the dignity of fully belonging to the people of GOD to ALL kinds of people whose company the respectable and the pious emphatically did not want to be.'¹

The people of Jesus time found it very difficult to understand this, and we know that the early church found it very difficult to understand- because being united by faith is repeated again and again in the letters to the churches.

Even in the letter of Ephesians, the notion of unity is repeated- IN chapter 1 (1:22-23), Through Christ, both Jews and Gentile groups are now joined together and draw nearer to God forming one body with Christ at its head. In chapter 2 (2:21-22).² we hear that Jesus has broken down the dividing walls, The image used about the people of God, is of all being united in Christ as a holy temple growing into Jesus as the corner stone who holds all things together.

The image used, just two chapters on, is again of the body. United we grow up into the head of the body who is Christ. We are to mature into the head v 16- *we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the whole body's growth.*

Now, when I read that I couldn't stop myself thinking of the inflatable caricature of Donald Trump- the Baby Bimp balloon! You know, the one that was flown over Parliament square earlier in July when Donald Trump visited. Because the whole body looked like Donald Trump's head...but to some extent that image in my imagination was right... what happened to the big balloon- it was tossed to and fro

¹ Rowan Williams *Meeting God in Paul*, SPCK 2015 p30

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=373
Susan Hylen

and blown about by the wind...and had to be pegged down securely. In our reading today Paul says, that one of the purposes of being united, each of us sharing our gifts that God has given us to so that we are not 'tossed around by the wind of every doctrine'. (v14)

More seriously, how do we mature TOGETHER into the head of Christ, according to Paul?

(The word for Christ here means in v 13, the complete man, the mature man. The church is already the body of Christ, even as it grows to maturity.)

- The calling of God-

We mature together, united, equally because God calls us in Christ. And that is the bedrock of unity. It is GOD's initiative. Our belonging comes from God. God invites us. And *no matter what we think about our neighbour, God incomprehensibly want him or her there.*³

And that is why Paul writes about unity again and again- he is like a Father to the church saying, 'Come on, you keep wanting to go backward to a situation where belonging to the community depends on something other than God's call.'⁴

(In Galatians a lot of that discussion takes place.)

God is already pleased with you in the simple sense that he has decided to invite you and accept you.⁵ God is not sitting there arms folded waiting for you to entertain him or satisfy him or make him happy or pleased with you.

We are all called by God. I am called by God. You are called by God. Someone walking in off the street is called to be here by God. SO we cannot say who is in or out. Our job is to welcome them.

- We bear with one another - V 2

because we know that our invitation into the community comes from God. We bear with one another in gentleness, patience, and in humility. Easier said than done, we know. But as someone once said- if we talk the talk, we should walk the walk.

There is a story of princess Margaret, daughter of our Queen Elizabeth. It was her first time meeting dignitaries and she was asked to make a speech to greet them. Just before she got up to begin her speech, it is said that the Queen whispered in her ear- Remember you are a princess, walk like a princess, talk like a princess!⁶

Paul is saying GOD called you. Live out that calling. The primary evidence that you walk with God, is that you live in unity with others.

The attitudes of our hearts if we walk with Jesus Christ, is to develop an attitude like Jesus Christ. And one of his key characteristics was Humility. Now humility was not seen as a virtue in the ancient world, humility of the self- gentleness, humility and patience. Yet Jesus demonstrates this time and time again- in washing his disciples feet, in serving all kinds of people below his status, in entering fully into human life within the world. Even when he suffering death amongst criminals, he spoke of one of them being with him in Paradise. He even stated, I have not come to be served but to serve.

We are to bear one another, humbly, with diligent effort. Romans 15 emphasises the strong have an obligation to bear with the weak, true Christianity is to be there. It is not automatic. Bear with one another in love, eager to maintain the spirit of peace.

³ Rowan Williams Paul p32

⁴ Rowan Williams p34

⁵ Rowan Williams p 34

⁶ Cutting it straight with HB Charles Junior, You Tube

Mark Oakley tells of a time when he was training to be a priest, and was invited by an older vicar to stand with him, next to the couple he was marrying. The couple were devoted to each other. After they had taken their vows, the priest leaned forward and whispered to the couple. I have been married for 51 years and I don't have any secrets on how to keep a relationship like yours fresh. But I want you to promise me, today, that you will always try to do three things. Always say- I'm sorry. Always say- I forgive you and please do not stop telling each other 'I love you!'

We are not married to each other as a congregation, but I think we can take this advice. In order to keep healthy relationships that unite us as a whole we need to apologise, forgive and build each other up in love.

If we look further on in our passage, Paul says it is our work to build up one another and promote the growth of the WHOLE body v15, 16. We speak the truth in LOVE v 15

This is a challenge to give each other enough space and attention in words and actions to ensure growth for us all.

'Spiritual union with God in love, leads ultimately to reconciliation, wholeness and unity. It is both a gift and a task. A gift in which we are dependent on God and a task we must pursue with unremitting eagerness.'⁷

- We honour the gifts of grace God gives to different people in the church v 7- 14.

Finally, Unity is not uniformity. In Ephesians 3 we have the wisdom of God being spoken about in "Its rich variety" (3:10). And here we see Paul's understanding of the leadership gifts in the early church.

He speaks in a Poetic way using the Psalms as he explains that the gifts Jesus gives are part of the great story of salvation Jesus has achieved. After the Exodus, when Israelites were rescued from slavery, Moses went up the mountain Sinai and came down with the law for the Israelites unity. So through the ascension of Jesus, the culmination of Jesus salvation of birth, works, death and resurrection, Jesus going up to the heavenly realms results in the sending of the Holy Spirit, the teacher, the wisdom, the giver of gifts of grace... v ⁸

Different members of each community are given different gifts to serve the church.

Apostles

Teachers

Evangelists

Pastors

All called by God, given gifts by the Holy Spirit in order to build up the body of Christ, the church. We all have different gifts given to us, each one of us, that matter and can be used to enable all of us to reach Christian maturity.

.. and just as the nursery song ends up with the head so does Paul, speaking to many different churches, he has developed talk about God which says we are united by God's grace as a body builds up into the head.

⁷ Visions of Glory – quotes on Communion

⁸ Tom Wright Paul for everyone , The Prison Letters, SPCK 2002

So let us pause and consider

-we are all called here by God

-we each have gifts given from God through the Holy Spirit

How can we build one another up into Jesus Christ- What can we do or say or pray, in love, to help each other be united and grow in faith?

One finger

One thumb

One arm, one leg, one head

One body

One spirit

One hope

One Lord

One faith

One baptism

One God

One grace for each one of us

Amen.