

“Unity in the Body of Christ”  
Ephesians 4:1-16  
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This morning’s New Testament scripture that Barbara just read from Ephesians calls us to be God’s unified people in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It profoundly speaks to us here at Presbyterian Church of Palatine as we are living in this important time in the history of this congregation. From the translation, the Message, Ephesians 4: 1-3:

“I want you to get out there and walk – better yet – run! – On the road God called you to travel. I don’t want any of you sitting on your hands....do this with humility and discipline – not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.” (Ephesians. 4: 1-3)

Paul reminds us that the message of Jesus Christ calls us to adopt the following outlook toward life. Verse 3 from the NRSV translation:

“Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (NRSV – Ephesians 4: 3)

That is our charge and calling today as it has been in the past.

Several years ago I read Wayne Dyer’s book entitled, “Excuses Be Gone!” In the book Dyer recounts a story about a fictional character by the name of Birdsnest:

Long ago in China there lived a monk who perched in a certain tree everyday to meditate. No matter if the tree swayed in the wind and rain, the monk settled comfortably high in the branches. Because of this, the local villagers nicknamed him “Birdsnest.”

Many of the villagers passed beneath the tree while hunting or gathering wood in the forest, and after a time, they grew used to him. Some began to stop and talk of their concerns with Birdsnest. They liked the things he had to say, and soon Birdsnest became known for his kind and thoughtful words.

After some years, the monk's wise reputation spread throughout the province. Visitors from distant cities hiked to the remote forest for advice. Even the governor of the province decided that he too would like to visit Birdsnest to discuss matters of importance. So one spring morning, the governor set off to find him. After traveling for several days he at last located Birdsnest's tree in the dense forest. The monk sat calmly high in the topmost branches, enjoying the warmth and the birdsong of spring.

Looking up, the governor shouted, "Birdsnest! I am governor of the province and I have come a great distance to speak with you! I have a most important question!"

The governor waited for a reply but heard only the pleasant sound of leaves stirring in the breeze.

The governor continued: "This is my question: tell me, Birdsnest, what is it that all the wisest ones have taught? Can you tell me the most important thing the Buddha ever said?"

There was a long pause – just the soft nestle of leaves again.

Finally the monk called down from the tree: "Here is your answer, Governor:

Don't do bad things. Always do good things. That's what all the Buddha's taught."

But the governor thought this answer was far too simple to have walked two days for! Irritated and annoyed, he stammered,

"Don't do bad things; always do good things! I knew that when I was three years old."

Looking down at the governor, Birdsnest replied with a wry smile.

“Yes, the three year olds know it, but the eighty-year olds still finds it very difficult to do!”

As we seek to be in union with each other and live out the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, with all our soul and strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves; we need to simply:

“Do good things, and don’t do bad things.”

Bad thoughts prompt you to engage in self-limiting behaviors; good thoughts, on the other hand, support your desire and capacity to do good things, to live at the high levels of joy, peace, and love.

As we contemplate our mission and vision for the future here at Presbyterian Church of Palatine, we are reminded in our scripture lesson today that:

“We are all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.” (Ephesians. 4: 4-6; The Message)

Abraham Maslow wrote that self-actualizing people never use their minds to think about what they don’t wish to attract.

They don’t worry about an illness getting worse, a downturn in the economy, a negative outcome to a daily problem, or thinking that their children will get in trouble, and so on. Their minds focus on the conditions they wish to produce – then the lucky break, the right people or circumstances or synchronistic opportunity somehow presents themselves as a result of their positive attitude.

We all become what we think about, so it’s pretty important to pay attention to those thoughts.

When I was 36 years old, I decided to change careers. I had been a Presbyterian pastor for ten years, and increasingly unhappy. I finally

decided that I had to leave the ordained ministry in order to learn more about myself: “to be all that I could be.” I had made a lot of excuses for a long time not to do that. But I finally decided, “No more excuses.”

I was going to find a new job, a new career. I had no idea what that might be, but I finally decided that I could do it. And guess what? The right people, the right circumstances appeared. For over four months while I was still the pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in Rushville, IN., I traveled to Chicago for two to three days a week to talk to as many people as I could. I believed that with their help, I would find a new opportunity.

I was determined. My mind was focused on all the possibilities. I never gave up.

After five months I received an offer to go to work at Continental Bank, the 7<sup>th</sup> largest bank in the country, as a supervisor in the Charge Card Division. Three years later I was promoted to an Officer of the bank in the Personnel Department.

This all happened because I was positive, I was determined, and I believed that with God’s help I would be shown the way.

As we begin to contemplate our vision for the future of this church are we willing to see a new and glorious future? Are we determined; Are we positive; and do we believe that with God’s help we will be shown the way?

We are all worthy of attracting unlimited abundance and newness of life, regardless of our past history and all our previous experiences.

In Proverbs 29 verse 18 we read:

“Where there is no vision the people perish.”

Where there is faulty vision based on excuses we will perish.

Throughout this time we need to keep before us our vision statement that challenges us to: Celebrate God; Grow in Christ; and to Extend the Spirit.

We need to adopt and hold onto a vision that asserts:

We are entitled to be a church where people are respected and loved; a church that cares for one another and reaches out to others who are in need of the hearing and experiencing the gospel message.

If this becomes your vision, your calling, and you are willing and absolutely determined to accomplish that vision; it will be accomplished.

Abraham Maslow also observed about self-actualizing people:

“They must be what they can be.”

So what can you be?

In order to be all that you can be you need to be willing to say “yes” to the signals from within you, the God within you who wants you to be all you can be.

In our Unity in the Spirit we are called to be God’s active and compassionate people:

“I want you to get out there and walk – better yet – run! – on the road God called you to travel. I don’t want any of you sitting on your hands....do this with humility and discipline – not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.” (Ephesians. 4: 1-3; The Message)

As we come to the table this morning, we come with a vision to be all that we can be; confident that God will show us the way. We have to do our part, which means that we:

- Won’t do bad things, we will do good things.

- It means that we will use this time to think about the positive things we wish to attract; and we will focus our minds and attention on those things!
- And we will “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Jesus says, “With God all things are possible.” (Matt. 19: 26)

Again listen to what Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 4: 15-16:

“God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love – we take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.” (Ephesians. 4: 15-16; The Message)

Amen!