

## ***Growing Up in Jesus series ~ A Study of Ephesians***

Wk 2: *No Longer Alone in the Chaos* - (Drawing from Eugene Peterson's *Practice Resurrection*)

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - March 7, 2021

I'll begin by reading Ephesians 4:1-8 from the Message paraphrase.

**1-3** In light of all this, here's what I want you to do. While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, 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 around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you 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.

**4-6** You were 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.

**7-13** But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift. The text for this is,

*He climbed the high mountain,  
He captured the enemy and seized the plunder,  
He handed it all out in gifts to the people.*

We began our series last week on the book of Ephesians, and we're going to cover it from the center out. That is, starting with the main themes and out to the whole book.

Paul begins chapter four with a “therefore” statement. **In light of all this, here’s what I want you to do....**

The Bible tells us of God's plan, worked out by Jesus, a long range plan in which everything will be brought together and summed up in Jesus, brought under His rule. Everything in heaven and everything on earth brought under Jesus’ leadership, under Jesus’ Headship it says. The Bible says Jesus is the Head of His Body the Church. This means having our beliefs and actions, what we know and what we do, coming under Jesus’ leadership. He has authority in life and in death and that’s good news, because He promises good for us. Growing up in Jesus to maturity as His Body also means we are no longer alone in our sometimes chaotic world.

In the youth confirmation class I’m leading, we recently talked about Jesus as Lord and what that means in our world today. It’s a bold statement to say, “*Jesus is the Head of our Church and the Lord of our lives.*” And He’s much more than that: He’s our brother, our savior, our friend. Jesus is the author of the abundant life He calls us to.

Ephesians 4:14-16 in the Message paraphrase says all this well, when we’re growing up in Jesus, then...

**No prolonged infancies among us, please. We’ll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are easy prey for predators. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and**

**tell it in love—like Christ in everything. 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.**

We'll begin now with the central theme of Ephesians. At the center of Ephesians there is a single Greek word, *Axios*, on which the entire letter pivots. Translated as "worthy" the word occurs in this sentence, **"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to live [or walk] a life *worthy* of the calling to which you have been called."** Ephesians 4:1

Eugene Peterson says, *Axios* is a word with a picture in it. In Greek, an *axios* is a set of balancing scales, the kind of scales formed by across beam balance on a post, with a pan suspended from each end of the beam. The items balanced in the Ephesians scales are God's calling and human living: **"I beg you,"** writes Paul, **"to walk worthy of the calling to which you've been called."** When our living and God's calling are in balance, we are whole; we are living maturely, living responsibly to God's calling, living congruent with the way God calls us into being. *Axios*, *worthy* is about being mature, healthy, and robust in love. Who doesn't want those?

The balancing scales then, the *axios*, centers the Ephesian letter. Everything in Paul's letter is designed to keep God's calling (chapters 1-3) and our living (chapters

4-6) in equilibrium. When God's calling and our living fit, we are growing up in Christ.

There is an equilibrium in the Christian life: an equilibrium in Christian maturity. With the Truth of Scripture and Jesus as our Head: *God calls; we walk. Walk* in Paul's terminology simply means "live". "*God calls, we live.*" It's what we knew Jesus wants when we heard the fisher's of men story in the Bible, Jesus calls and we walk with Him. It's what we knew when we took our own confirmation classes: Jesus' is our Lord, our Head, our Savior, and we walk with Him. It's what we knew when we chose to follow Jesus. We wanted life with Him on the road of life.

Jesus calls.... Here are two Bible examples.

Jesus on the shores of Galilee called four disciples by name. Jesus kept calling more and the four soon became twelve. They followed Him up and down the roads of Galilee, listening, obeying, questioning, observing, praying. Later, after they He had become accustomed to the sound of His voice, Jesus called them again. This time the call was to take up their cross and follow Him to His cross, His death in Jerusalem. They heard the call and lived with Him. In the balance of Jesus' call and their walk, they became the people that the Holy Spirit formed into the church. *Axios: He calls and we live the Christian life.*

Another call: A man named Saul walking on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians was stopped in his

tracks by a voice that addressed him by name: “**Saul, Saul!**” Like Moses 1200 years before him, he learned the name of the One who called him by name; this time the name of the One who called him was Jesus. And in that calling Saul’s very name was changed. So he was converted on the spot from chasing down those called by Jesus to being one called by Jesus. *Axios*: Paul now walked on the road of life in rhythm with Jesus.

As we live our lives with Jesus His company becomes more familiar. He is personal, after all. Our language for God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit also, rather necessarily, become increasingly personal as we live our lives loved by God. We may start out wanting to learn information about God or reciting the correct doctrine, but soon we must find ourselves speaking intimately of God. I once asked Duane Graham how he would describe his relationship with God and he said, “God is a friend.” Perfectly said, Duane! It made me smile. *Axios*: As we live loved we come to know God’s personal voice.

As we respond to God’s call, as we live our lives with Jesus as our Head, we start to get a feel for the intricacies of God speaking. If our language about God is ever stuck on doctrine and \$3 theological phrases, then I’d say we haven’t an ear for the words of God’s living voice. You might say, rather than hearing the living God, doctrine is the sound of dead leaves blowing. There’s a rustle, but it’s dead. Yet as we live loved by God, we come to know the voice of our living God who is with us in the world today.

Axios: As we live with Jesus, our language for God necessarily become more personal. It has too! We have lived stories with the living God, just like we have live stories with our family and friends. And then another change: as we live with Jesus, our language for God also becomes inter-personal. We are His Body, the Church, after all. No one walking with Jesus is an island.

We all know the hymn that says, *“I walk through the garden alone,”* but we also know we cannot have Jesus all to ourselves. If we are to get in on all that is going on in this adventure as His Body, we must extend our God conversation to include others. As our conversation with God gets more personal, our conversation also includes others. The life Paul talks about with Jesus as our Head needs our, **“pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love”**.

Axios: My relationship with God is personal, but I also personally relate to others who have been called and are living loved by God. The Christian life of growing into maturity in Jesus is a Christian life lived in the community of His people. Hence the need for **“acts of love”** and **“being quick to mend fences.”**

The Ephesian letter speaks of others on the road with Jesus. Paul’s metaphor for this is **“the body of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:12). Everybody different, everyone connected. Ephesians 4:16, **“joined and knit together by every ligament”**. Ephesians 5:32, **“Christ and the church”**

gathers for worship and this is the context for “**growing up**” to the “**full stature of Christ.**”

Certainly we can worship alone. Some of our richest moments of worship will come while strolling on a beach or wandering in a garden or sitting on a mountain peak. Worship not only shapes us individually, but worship also shapes us as a community, as a church. Growing up into maturity in Jesus, is necessarily done with others responding to His call, whether or not that happens in a building. The Body of Christ, as Paul calls us, lives under Jesus Headship, whether we live together in one community or are spread throughout the world. *Axios*: We are not alone in our response to Jesus.

But people often dismiss gathered worship. One of the common dismissals of worship is that it is, well, so common. Many have said, it is so boring, or nothing happens, or “*I don’t get anything out of it.*” As a teen, I remember walking to 7-11 for a soda, instead of walking to what I thought was a boring worship service.

There are a lot of people in the world who think this, so rather well-meaning people decide to change it up, add some amplification, or in Eugene Peterson’s words, “*add some adrenaline to it,*” in hopes to draw in more people. That’s fine, there’s no one style or form of worship is described in the Bible. Churches can get creative. I enjoy the variety we have in music and instruments and singers here at First Presbyterian.

But if we add some “adrenaline”, don’t be mistaken: worship isn’t really supposed to MAKE something happen. What worship does, even modest worship, even a little bit boring worship: what common worship does, Eugene Peterson says, is it brings order to our life with others. How so? What kind of order?

Well, consider the rest of life, mere existence through a year like 2020 is a bit of chaos we’ve endured. Day to day is actually a little bit chaotic: Things happen with apparent unpredictability and in a disorderly way.

We may try to schedule things, add some rules in the mix, or live by the clock by setting all our appointments, but sooner or later, we all realize these are just our best attempts to control and bring order to what is more naturally an existence of chaos. Physics gave it the name, “The Second Law of Thermodynamics,” which says, *“left to themselves, things tend to fall apart or revert to chaos.”* Just look at a pantry or a workshop or a kids room without routines for bringing order to them. Chores may not be fun, but they are a good thing for restoring order.

Now while it may sometimes feel like a chore, common worship functions in this way in our lives. It provides some order for God’s people responding to God’s call. But note: none of you has to come to worship with other Christians. And note: our gathered worship isn’t supposed to change our society by imposing order or anything on it. Or

common worship is more about what God does, than what we do.

So why worship with other Christians? Because God calls us together to worship as part of our growing up in Jesus. Common worship brings an order of love to our life together. It's not about trying to turn back the clock morally to a preferred time before the chaos of the world. Gathered worship is about redemption. It's about what God has done and is doing.

Gathering forms a community, we visibly see others who have also responded to God's call and are living with Jesus. Gathered worship then takes forms that remind us of redemption: Jesus' redeeming work, His redeeming presence, and His never-giving-up love, as seen as the covenant meal of the Lord's Supper.

Gathered worship is about what God is doing. Worship is not about what we do, it's about what God does. After all, it is Jesus' presence that changes our world and our lives. He changes our lives and has put hope into our world. Worship calls us to an appropriate response to Jesus. Worship calls us to listen to the voice of God. Worship calls us to celebrate His covenant with us through the Lord's Supper. Worship calls us to align our lives with Him through Baptism. None of these can be imposed by Christians on others. I once saw a movie where the main character was so concerned that his friend was not a Christian that he snuck up behind and dunked his head in

a bowl of water to make sure he was baptized. Worship of God can't be imposed on others.

We gather in common worship, because we're responding to God's call on our lives and so we want to be with others we see also responding to God's call. We want to be part of **"pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love."** What an amazing help amidst the difficulties of our world: We're called to a community that cares for each other.

Worship is then unobtrusive, without coercion. Without fanfare, without drawing attention to ourselves: our common worship makes certain we know we are never alone in this resurrection life. Worship creates order. We go from here, living loved by God, each one of us important to Jesus, growing up mature in Him as He brings order to the sometimes chaos of our lives.

Gathered worship is then less about what we do and more about what God does. It is an insistent witness to God's good plan for our lives. *Axios*: God calls and we live loved with Him.

Paul's words about Jesus' Church, Paul's words to us, are some of the clearest help we've been given. I'll read them again and hopefully, they now sound like words to us personally about our life together.

Paul writes from prison,

In light of all this, here's what I want you to do. While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, 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 around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you 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. 4-6 You were 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.

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