

Ephesians week 4

10/07/22 09:30 St Peter

We've come to the fourth week of our sermon series on Paul's letter to the new church in Ephesus in what is today south-west Turkey. In the first half of this letter to the Ephesians, in chapters 1-3, St Paul introduces some key Christian thinking:

- That we blessed by God and are all part of the Church or Ekklesia – a community of communities of faith
- That our hope and salvation is found in God's love for us, not in how much we try to please God, or do good things
- That God's great riches – his healing and forgiveness – are available to all; no one is beyond God's mercy.

Now in the second half of his letter, beginning in Chapter 4, Paul begins to apply these thoughts to the Church.

In a week that has seen mass political resignations, including finally of the PM as leader of his party, perhaps the spotlight has been shone more than ever on the values we expect of our leaders. As Government ministers, one by one, began to realise that the Prime Ministers conduct was not what they expected, we saw before our eyes Government failing. Thankfully the PM understood and responded in the right way. In the end, this wasn't a dispute about policy, but about values and trust.

St Paul says to start chapter 4 "I .. beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". (4:1-3)

For the Christian our faith is all about values. We must live lives, individually and corporately together as the Church of Jesus Christ, that reflect what our faith proclaims. Our calling is to maintain unity in the Spirit of God. In a moment we will think a bit more about what that word unity might mean.

St Paul goes on in verse 4 where he talks of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith. 7 times in one sentence he uses the same word 'one'. Perhaps the Ephesians church was hopelessly divided and Paul's job was to plead with them to come together. For most of its life the Christian church has been faced with disagreement and division. Think of all the different denominations – the great falling out between Christian East and West, or the reformation falling out between Catholic and Protestant. Yet we are called to be one Church - one body of faith. A community of communities yes - but one Church with the same calling. Each of us Christians individually is asked the question - which of our priorities do we put before the calling to be one? After a week of huge difficulties, senior members of the Conservative Party are now calling for unity. A coming together and an end to fighting. We will wait to see whether that happens. But the Christian church, whilst called to unity, must not interpret that word to mean uniformity. We are not called to be the same – but we are called to come together in the Holy Spirit, recognising one another, praying for one another, and together building the Kingdom of God. Sometimes the Church has used the list of gifts St Paul gives us in chapter 4 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, etc.) as a way of dividing the church. The Church has been very good at using this gifts to create authorised ministries which enable some, and yet disable who feel they are not called to them. The Church always has been good at trying to control people! Yet Paul states these gifts are there to equip the saints – to build up other people in their faith; to serve other people. Whatever our church tradition, one central test arises for every Christian and Church – does the way that we act and behave empower and equip all the baptised or only some whilst marginalising others?

Paul reminds the Christians in Ephesus that their calling is to know their salvation in Jesus Christ, and the great riches God bestows on them. But this calling must lead them to strive to be in unity with one another, and to work to equip all believers – to build up the body. All Christians are called to become more like Jesus. That is why we have set our parish vision to “Become a more Christ-like community”. Our calling is to grow one another’s faith – to help discern the call of God in one another’s life, where we might discover calling to be pastors, evangelists, teachers, or even ordained ministers! And that calling is one to grow together – as a church, as churches within one parish, and between parishes and with other denominations. Our priority and focus must always be on how we are equipping all our members – young and old – to grow together in their Christian faith. That needs to affect the work we do each week, month and year; it needs to affect where we spend our time as a church and how we spend our money. The making of disciples of our chief aim, and one I encourage us all to maintain as our focus.