

**01/08/2021 Ephesians 4:1-16 Pastor Fraser Pearce**

To get a feel for where today's Ephesians' reading is coming from  
Imagine being invited to a special event  
Like a grand wedding with a formal and elaborate reception.  
What would you wear to such a wedding?  
How would you behave at such a reception?  
We just know that wearing our unwashed gardening clothes to such a wedding  
Would be entirely inappropriate –  
Not just that it would be *morally* wrong  
Insofar as it would be rude to the bride and groom,  
But that it would show lack of sensitivity to and understanding of  
The joyful solemnity that is a wedding.  
It would be unfitting, *unworthy* behaviour for a guest.  
On the other hand, cleaning up; putting on our best clothes,  
This honours the couple, and is *worthy* of the occasion.

Likewise if we went to reception and stole the gifts given to the couple,  
Or got drunk and picked fights with the other guests,  
It wouldn't just be morally wrong,  
It would be behaviour entirely unfitting, *unworthy* of people freely invited  
To join in the festivities of a wedding.  
On the other hand, joining in the meal; eating and drinking with thanksgiving,  
Joyfully engaging in the celebrations, cheering and dancing,  
This is behaviour worthy of the celebration of a wedding.

Now St Paul has spent the first half of Ephesians  
Teaching us that we are together adopted into the family of God,  
And that our heavenly Father has, through the blood of Christ,  
Drawn us near to himself and to each other,  
So that we may grow in knowledge of his love for us,  
So that we participate in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
Now St Paul is starting to draw out the implications of this  
Especially of our life together as his people.  
Today I'm going to proclaim the Good News from God's word  
That God is giving us a beautiful way to live together  
A way of life marked by humility, gentleness, patience, and love,  
A way of life *worthy* of people who have been graciously invited  
To live together in the household of God.

This is how the reading begins: **I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...**

Now St Paul is writing from captivity:  
His faithful preaching of the Gospel has led to opposition  
That has seen him arrested and facing charges.  
St Paul, in other words, has a proven track record of being willing to suffer  
For the sake of the Gospel.  
And it's from this place of authentic faith  
That St Paul gives encouragement to Christian people  
Not just to do what is *morally* right  
But to think and act in ways that are *fitting* with the great call we have,  
With the invitation we have, to live as one people in the household of God.

Listen to what he says: **I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, 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.**

Now this takes some unpacking.

Today we'll focus on two of the words that St Paul uses:

'Humility' and 'Gentleness'.

Let's start with the word 'humility'.

What would it mean for us to live with all humility?

Well, in thinking about this, let's turn to some teaching of Jesus on this theme.

This comes from Luke 18: **[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'**

What is the picture of humility in this parable?

It's the picture of the tax collector

Who comes into the temple, into the place of God's gracious presence,

And pleads for mercy: he pleads for God to atone for his sins.

The tax collector shows humility in comparing himself

*Not with other people, but with God, and with his righteous demands.*

The tax collector shows humility in recognising the truth:

That he needed an atoning sacrifice.

He shows humility in having a righteousness that comes as a gift from God,

Rather than from his own ability to keep the rules.

Now we can know that if we live our lives in God's family

By comparing ourselves with our brothers and sisters

*That this behaviour is not worthy of us:* God loves all his children,

And although there is indeed behaviour that is rewarded by God,

And there is behaviour that will lead God to discipline us,

We do well always to understand that we are part of the one family.

Parents, you know how this is: you love your children,

And it would give you no joy to learn that they think

That they are in competition with each other for your love.

You want them to trust that you love each one of them.

You want them to understand that you have rules in your household,

Not to see who can compete best for you love,

But for the sake of unity in the family,

And so that your children will mature into people,

Capable of loving and being loved.

Now the humility that flows from knowing that we are loved by God

Also gives us the freedom to understand ourselves

Not just in terms of our need for atonement from sin,

But also in the knowledge of the *gifts* that we have been given,

And the *blessing* that this can be for others.

Listen, for example, to these words from Mary  
That we hear in Luke 1: **And Mary said,  
'My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness [the humility] of his servant.**

**Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;** Luke 1  
This is true humility: a frank acknowledgment by Mary  
That God has richly blessed her to be a blessing to others.  
There is no false humility or prideful arrogance here,  
But simply the true declaration that God has been gracious to her,  
And that through her God has blessed all generations with the gift of his Son.

Practically speaking, then, we live in all humility  
When we understand that we are joined together in our need for atonement:  
That none of us can earn a place in the household of God,  
But that we are graciously invited in.  
We live in humility as we honour each other  
As brothers and sisters in the one family,  
Trusting that God has brought us together to grow us in love.  
We also live in all humility when we recognise  
That we do have real gifts from God  
And that we are free to use these gifts in the service of others.  
This is in fact the point that St Paul develops as the chapter goes on.

The other word we're focusing on today is 'gentleness'  
Again, St Paul wrote: **I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to  
which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness,**

Some translations use the word 'meekness' here,  
But that, to my mind, brings up images of weakness,  
Whereas gentleness can and truly does exist with *strength*.

Jesus, in fact, uses the word in describing himself.  
Listen to what is recorded in Matthew's Gospel:

**[Jesus said,] 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you  
rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find  
rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'** Matthew 11

Jesus, in his earthly ministry, was gentle: He was not easily provoked to anger,  
And he showed great compassion to the sick, the weak,  
The ignorant and the outcast.

But when the circumstances demanded it, he could be forthright in action:  
Like clearing the temple from the moneychangers  
Or denouncing the teaching and the practices of the scribes and the pharisees.  
This is the sort of gentleness that is fitting for us as Christian people:  
To show compassion for each other and others in their need,  
And to be courageous in standing up for what is right and true.

Showing humility, showing compassion, living in love  
This is what is necessary for us if we are to live together in community,  
Where we must both have a pattern of rightly ordered behaviour,  
Together with a readiness to forgive one another,  
If we are to live at peace with each other.

And we have the freedom to live in Godly community  
And to have lives that are worthy of the calling God has given us  
Because of the unity that is in God, and that God shares with us.

This is how St Paul ends the opening verses of Ephesians 4:

**There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**

We belong together as members of the body of Christ,

We, by the one Spirit, confess that Jesus is Lord,

We have the one hope of the resurrection of the body,  
A hope that has begun to be realised in the resurrection of our Lord.

We together confess one faith in the Triune God,

And we do this as people who share the one baptism  
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And we together call out to the one God as our Father.

So let us live worthily according to the calling that God has given us.  
Knowing that it is by his Spirit that we are drawn to our Lord Jesus Christ,  
Who welcomes us as brothers and sisters in the one household.

May the peace of God that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.