All Together Now

Psalm 34:1-11 Kimby Young

Ephesians 4:1-16 November 10, 2024

This is my favorite time of year – autumn, harvest, as we approach Thanksgiving. I love the changing seasons, the crispness in the air, the smell of fall, and the crunch of leaves. And the anticipation of things to come. For me – it is very easy to count my blessings – I have so many, including you and this community of caring. For others it might be harder to see the blessing. Perhaps as you face challenges or anticipate a difficult holiday season to come. But for all of us, this season is a time to recognize God’s presence – in the good and the bad. We see God’s gifts all around us and we celebrate all that is good and right, all that is possible by the grace of God. And we listen again for God’s call to each of us for the days ahead. We think about where God might be calling us and how we might serve God in the days and years ahead.

Appropriate to the season of giving thanks, next week we dedicate our pledge offerings of money, time, talent and prayer. We bring before God our promises for the year ahead and our hopes for this congregation. We have a lot of hopes for this congregation these days. Exciting things are happening. With excitement also comes a lot of busy-ness – a lot to do and a lot to pray about. We have great hope and great grace in the promises of God for all who believe.

The scripture for today from Ephesians lives in that hope, while recognizing the world in which we live – with all its fear and division and suffering. This scripture tells us to come together and to advance the will of God, to offer our gifts in response to the gifts of God. The scripture from Ephesians is all about God’s gifts – how they are given and how we are called to use our gifts. So I invite you into a Bible study lesson. If you have a Bible, I ask you to open it to Ephesians chapter 4. In the pew Bible that is page 1821, and keep your Bibles open as we dig in and unpack this scripture passage and see what God has to say to us through these words.

The first line is – “live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” To understand that message you have to think about your life, your calling – this isn’t talking about ordained ministry. This is talking about faithful, ordinary, daily, beautiful Christian living. What does it mean for you in ordinary daily life, to live faithfully and fully? How are you called to share God’s love every single day? The rest of the passage spells that out – humility, gentleness, patience; bearing with one another in love; making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That unity of the Spirit, that bond of peace, that connection to others, is because of our oneness in Christ. Because if we are one in Christ, we want what God wants and we do everything to make it so, to accomplish the will of God.

Now how we do that – how we live God’s will is going to vary from person to person. How we live God’s will depends on the gifts God has given us. There’s a huge list of gifts in the scripture and callings thru which to use God’s gifts – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. I could add to that list – teachers, singers, musicians, ushers, worship leaders, elders, deacons, committee members, sound and video people, kitchen workers, grounds keepers, Joy Closet volunteers, other mission volunteers, shut in visitors, transportation providers, and all the many ways you serve God. The list goes on and on. Your gifts might be one of those but might be entirely different. The point is to think about what you’re good at, what resources you have, abilities, experiences, and to remember that you have what you have for a purpose.

I want to concentrate on that purpose – the purpose of your gifts. It’s hidden in verse 12 and 13. The purpose of your gifts are “to prepare God’s people for works of service” or some translations say “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

You’ve heard that before, but have you heard it? Your gifts are not for you. That’s not what the world says, the world says your gifts are for you to use as you wish. But God says, your gifts – the gifts God has given you – are for others. Your gifts are given to you – not just to enjoy or to advance your career or enhance your family (although you may do that as well, just not only that). Further, your gifts are not just to improve your relationship with God, though that may happen. The primary purpose of the gifts you have been given is to help others to know and serve God. To help others. To build up others. To make sure other people know God. How can you use your resources and abilities to help others to know and serve God?

I’m going to pause here and ask you to think about that. How can you use your resources and abilities to help others to know and serve God? Really, that’s what this church is all about. Working together to serve God. The primary purpose of our gifts is to help others to know God, because that builds up the body of Christ, and that increases love in the world. By the grace of God and as we work together, we grow in love, we grow into what Christ calls us to be. As scripture says, we grow “into the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” So that when others look at us, they see Christ.

I see Christ in you – in a classroom full of inquiring minds seeking to understand God, in those who teach both our children and our adults, in social settings and meals shared together, in care packages lined up for children around the world, in clothing cleaned and sorted and given to those in need thru the joy closet, in your welcoming smiles and your outstretched hands, in musicians who lift their voices or instruments to God’s glory and make music purely for the sake of praise, in those who care for children and plan good programs, in youth who share what they believe with love and compassion, in people who stop and listen, in walls painted and yard work done for others, in meeting after meeting after meeting attended, in meals that appear at doors for those who are sick or bereaved, in stacks of cards sent, in phone calls and transportation provided, and encouraging words everywhere. In prayer offered through word and deed. The list goes on and on and on, of how you live love in this body of Christ. You offer yourselves and your lives to one another and to the world, and it makes a difference. It shows. Christ shows in you.

We are growing up into Christ. In many ways we are already there, showing Christ to the world, living God’s love in the world. In other ways we have room to grow. To become that “whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” What more should we do together? How else can we reach out as the hands and feet of Jesus here in Gardner? There is room to grow. There is reason to celebrate. There is grace overflowing in the abundant love of God. In this season as we celebrate God’s gifts. We will recognize all that God has given us, all that God has done for us, all that God has created in us. And we will give thanks to God. May you be blessed this day, this week and this season, as you live in God’s grace and goodness, and as you live into the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Amen.

November 10 2024

Psalm 34:1-11

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.

I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

Look to him, and be radiant, so your faces shall never be ashamed.

This poor soul cried and was heard by the Lord and was saved from every trouble.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.

O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.

The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

Ephesians 4:1-8, 11-16

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner 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: 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.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it is said,

“When he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”

He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, 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 body’s growth in building itself up in love.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.