

**Ephesians 4** *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

**John 17** <sup>20</sup> *'My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

<sup>24</sup> *'Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

<sup>25</sup> *'Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.'*

We live in a world full of division even in our western democracies Democrats against Republicans, Republicans against other republicans, Remainers and Brexiteers, Britain and Europe, even the great EU project is struggling to hold together with divisions between east and western Europe, north and south.

Perhaps this is why, as we heard in the gospel reading today, Jesus' deepest longing was that his followers would be truly united: He prayed that all his followers *may be brought to complete unity*. As we know, Jesus fundamental instruction to his followers, his *new commandment*, was. *Love one another, as I have loved you. By this shall all know that you are my disciples*. Jesus came to form a new community, a new humanity, and the fundamental thing that is to distinguish us from the rest of the world is our unity with each other.

This is why in Ephesians 2 Paul reminds his readers how they have been called to be one people. *one body of Christ, one household, one family of God* Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, rich and poor, well-educated and uneducated, black, white, yellow, Liberal, Socialist, Conservative, posh or ordinary. This call to unity is a fundamental part of being a follower of Christ.

Sadly it is something we find incredibly hard to put into practice: we often see divisions within the church – I wonder what Paul would have thought about the vast array of different denominations we have today. *Welshman rescued from a desert island. Had built not one chapel but two. Why? You see that chapel over there. That's the one I don't go to*

And then even within the Anglican church - even within the C of E. Even more sadly often there are divisions within a local church. It is amazing that even when we know how important it is to get on with one another, how difficult we find it to put into practice. So what can we do?

Paul has spent the first half of his letter to the Ephesians reminding them of what God has done for them and his plans and purposes for his church. Now he gets down to the nitty-gritty: ***I urge you.. as a prisoner for the Lord, enabling people to believe the gospel is so important to me, I have gone to prison for it – don't let my work be in vain... to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.***

That calling is, as we heard Jesus pray, *that we may be one as Jesus and his Father are one, that we may be brought to complete unity.*

But how is this possible ? Paul makes it clear that there is no magic formula. Nor is it about having one huge super-denomination, the right structure or constitution, after all there was only one denomination when Paul was writing, but that didn't mean they had no problems with unity! No it comes down to our attitude of heart as individuals, our commitment.

<sup>2</sup> ***Be completely humble*** Well that's easy enough isn't it ? *Just read my best-selling book: How I became the most humble person in the world !*

*Donald Trump "I think I am actually humble, I think I'm much more humble than you would understand,"*

Being humble is not a pose, but the opposite of pride. It's recognizing that you are a flawed and fallible human being, that your reaction or perception of a situation may be wrong, that the other person is a precious child of God and must be treated as such.

**Secondly *be gentle*; or *mEEK*.** Not weakness, but a willingness to use your gifts in the service of others, to put, their interests first.

It's the attitude of heart that says: *how can I best serve you, help you, encourage you.* It's the attitude of heart that led Jesus to put a slave's towel around his waist and kneel and wash his disciples' feet...

It's the attitude that brought him to be born in a stable and took him all the way to the cross

***be patient, bearing with one another in love.*** Often your brother or sister in Christ can be a real pain in the neck! But God loves them and his holy Spirit is at work within them. You need to be patient with them, since God is probably having to be a lot more patient with you.

It's not always easy to be like this. Paul talks about *making every effort*. That means that at times it is hard work and sometimes downright costly. The only way we are going to do this is if we are highly motivated.

### **What gives us that motivation?**

Paul talks about the *the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*. What is that bond of peace? Surely it is that, as Paul sets out in chapter 2, Jesus came to this earth and gave his life that I might be reconciled to God and he did the same for my brother and sister. That we might both be at peace with him and at peace with one another. This is the bond that binds us together.

Paul goes on to remind us of all the reasons why we need to strive for unity:

*One body, one Spirit* – if we are followers of Jesus, then we all part of the body of Christ and all have the same one Spirit in us – the Spirit of Jesus. We talk sometimes of *finding a kindred spirit* - *someone who has a similar outlook, priorities, passions as us. Someone who really understands us and we can understand. Someone for whom there is a natural empathy and affection.* Well everyone here doesn't just have a kindred spirit, we have *the same* Spirit, the Spirit of Christ.

*One hope* – One day, the whole of humanity will have to stand before the judgement throne of Christ. When you stand before him in all his holiness and glory, all too aware of your sin and failures, what hope will you have ?

If we are followers of Jesus, then we know that our *only* hope is the undeserved grace of God, that God in his mercy freely offers us his forgiveness that is available to us only because Jesus has died for us on the cross. That is certainly true if you are someone who has made a complete mess of your life and maybe of other people's lives as well and have only recently discovered the love and grace of Christ – and it is also certainly true even if you come from the most respectable Christian family and background. Whoever we are we have the only one hope.

*Eric Delve's story of the Bishop of Winchester (not an evangelical).* "I wanted to show that whoever we are, before the cross we all stand on level ground." This is our one hope and also our one *faith*.

We have only one hope, but our hope is much, much bigger than simply surviving the judgement of Christ. *Ephesians 1:18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.* We have all been called to part of the most wonderful, loving, compassionate, creative, Christ-like world-wide family with one loving heavenly Father.

I hope we have a glimpse of it in the love and fellowship we enjoy with one another here today. But at its very best it is only a tiny, tiny glimpse. We are so far from perfect. *We are like the west wall behind me – still under construction - except we need much much more than a few coats of limewash.* But one day all of us shall be made like Christ. We shall be part of a family of perfect human beings without fault or sin but filled to overflowing with the love of Christ. This is our destiny – our hope. This is why Paul urges us to start living it here and now.

Finally, *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*. If we are Christians then we all believe that Jesus alone is the one who can save us and that he is Lord – Lord of all creation. And if Jesus is my Lord, then that means being committed to doing what he wants, and above all he wants me to love my brother and sister in Christ.

If we truly are followers of Christ, then we claim we have surrendered our life to Him as our Lord and Saviour, for that is what happens at our baptism. We are united with him in the waters of baptism, in his death, so that we can be united with him in his risen life. That means dying to my old self that wants to put my interests first, and living a new risen life united with Christ, thinking with his mind and loving with his heart.

*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace* Look around you: these are your brothers and sisters in God's family for eternity – so start loving them now ! Is there someone you know you have been avoiding, because they have upset you – or because you know or suspect you have upset them. Resolve today, to sort it out as soon as possible. Seek prayer ministry if you need help with this.

And as for our brothers and sisters in other churches? Well, a good start would be to come to the Churches Together service tonight !