

The Church as a Witness to God's Calling

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[0 : 00] Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight.

! May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. In Ian's reading from the New Testament letter to the Ephesians, we heard these words in chapter 4 verse 1.

Uttered in the name and by the authority of the Apostle Paul. I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Let us take a moment to think about this simple plea. Every Christian church from the days of the Apostle Paul to the present day and to us.

Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. I simply want to ask two questions from our scripture reading. First, what is the calling you have received as the church?

[1 : 23] The opening three chapters of Ephesians set out the church's calling in all its glory. God's intent, God's purpose, is that through the church, the eternal purpose of God for the world should be made known.

Not through the BBC, not through Mr. Trump, but through you, the church. God is making known his purposes for the world.

And what is that purpose? It is to bring peace to our world by breaking down every wall that divides us as a human race.

And creating one new humanity out of all our warring tribes and groups. And how does God do that?

By sending his own beloved son into our world to live a life of loving obedience to God. Reconciling the world to God with his every breath.

[2 : 37] From birth to death. From the womb of Mary to his wounds on the cross. From his youthful wisdom in the temple to his working life in Nazareth.

From his healing ministry amid the crowds to his teaching ministry amid controversy. From his temptations in the desert to his trial before Pilate.

From the garden in Gethsemane to the resurrection breakfast by the Galilean Lake. Jesus was freely giving his whole life to reconcile a hostile humanity to God and to one another.

At every turn, Jesus is creating a new humanity in place of fear and hate. He's bringing in the leper and the outcast.

And the despised and the foreigner into the family of God. Then as now. And so Ephesians can say, Jesus not only brings peace to the world.

[3 : 50] He is the peace of the world. And it is through the church that God intends a divided world to discover God's loving purpose for it.

As it sees in the church a community reconciled to God and to one another. Living peaceably with all our differences.

Over the last two Sundays we've been thinking about the wisdom and power of God's way of saving the world. Not through coercion and violence like the tyrants of our time.

But through a love so wide and long and high and deep that it would go to any length to save the world God loves. Even death on a cross.

Such is the love of Christ for us. Each one of us. This is your calling. As Craig Lockhart Parish Church.

[4 : 54] To hold out to your community and city. The hope of a new humanity through the love of Christ. And to show its reality. In your everyday life together.

From your Christian aid giving. To the strawberry tea. And so second. What does it mean to live a life worthy of your calling?

Our reading from the verses that follow in Ephesians 4. Make it clear what that life looks like. You are to live as those who have already been reconciled to God.

In one new humanity. In Christ. As we sang in our opening hymn. You share one hope. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. And one God. And Father of you all. These are not things you are striving to gain.

[5 : 54] This is the unity you already enjoy. God's gift of unity in Christ. Christ. Or as Ephesians puts it. The unity of the Holy Spirit.

In the bonds of peace. And therefore. You are to live accordingly. If this is your calling. To make known.

Your new humanity in Christ. Reconciled to one another. Called to live in love. And care for one another. You are called to live out that new humanity. In your everyday life together.

How? Paul says. By exercising humility. Yourself. And showing gentleness. Patience.

Forbearance. And love. To others. In the body of Christ. Making every effort. Even when we disagree. Or are disappointed. In one another.

[6 : 52] Making every effort. To maintain the unity. Of the spirit. Humility. Gentleness. Patience. Forbearance.

And love. This is not just a list of fine qualities. That anyone of decency and goodwill. Would welcome. For us as Christians. We have seen these qualities before.

In the life and teaching of Jesus. In the gospels. Be completely humble. And gentle. Says Paul. To you the church. Paul is echoing the risen Christ.

Paul is echoing. Sorry. Paul is echoing. Jesus. In the sermon on the mount. Blessed are the meek. For they shall inherit the earth. Be patient.

Bearing with one another. In love. Says Paul. To the church. Paul is echoing. The risen Christ. When he came to that coward. Peter.

[7 : 53] By the lake shore. After his resurrection. And asked this failed disciple. Who denied him three times. Peter.

Do you love me? And feed my sheep. Who wants to know. Wholeness. And gentleness. And meekness.

And forbearing patience. And love. Then we find it. In Christ. In the gospels. And we are called. To follow. In the way.

Of our savior. Jesus. His way. Of meekness. And gentleness. His way. Of patience. And love. In our social media.

Culture of hate. And demonizing. One another. This. Is the way. The world. Needs. To hear. From the church.

[8 : 48] Why is this. So important. At this moment. In your life. Together. As Craig Lockhart Church. This is an era.

In which congregations. Are developing. New strategies. For ministry. And mission. Across the church. Of Scotland. And rightly so. But we need. To remember.

The practical wisdom. Which says. Culture. Eats strategy. For breakfast. In other words. You can draw up. The best action plans.

And goals. For outreach. And growth. But if the culture. Of the congregation. And the wider. Kirk. Is one of disunity. And division. Mistrust.

And suspicion. Then that culture. Will foil. The best laid plans. For church. Mice. And men. Every time. Having had the privilege.

[9 : 41] Of getting to know. This congregation. In recent months. I thank God. That you and your minister. Have already created. A culture of unity. Worthy of your calling.

As the church. In this place. Culture of gentleness. Patience. And forbearance. With one another. A culture of trust. In one another. A culture of love.

In Christ. Christ. That is why. Paul's plea. In Ephesians. Is so important. As you prepare. To do a new thing. In this coming year.

Or your minister. Is away. Let me apply. Paul's plea. To you. I urge you. To continue. To live. A life. Worthy. Of the calling. You have received. Continue. To live a life. Worthy. Of your calling. As witnesses. To God's. Wisdom. And power. And God.

[10:37] Will accomplish. Here. More than you can. Ask or imagine. Even in these. Challenging times. For the church. Of Scotland. When fear. About falling numbers.

And failing. Finances. Is so. Widespread. But Paul. Does not. Leave it there. As if. Everything. Rested. On us. Now. The danger. Is that we think. Okay. God. Is. Wisdom. And power. Has saved us. Through the death. And resurrection. Of his son.

We're forgiven. We're a new humanity. In Christ. Reconciled to God. And to one another. But now. It's up to us. To get on with it. Doing our best.

To be that loving. Community. In practice. No. Says Paul. Even now. In living this new life. Together.

[11:31] It is still. Not up to us. It is precisely. At the point. Where he calls. The church. To live a life. Worthy of our calling. That Paul.

In Ephesians. In the passage. Ian read to us. Paul turns to an aspect. Of the life. Of Christ. That is too often. Forgotten. Or neglected. Or even considered.

Embarrassing. To scientifically. Informed. Modern people. Put in a question. What happens to Jesus.

Between his resurrection. On Easter morning. And the pouring out. Of his spirit. On the disciples. On the day of Pentecost. The gospels.

And the book of Acts. The story of the early church. In the New Testament. The gospels. And the book of Acts. Are clear. About what happens. To Christ. After his resurrection. Both bear witness.

[12:29] To the experience. Of the disciples. After they find. The empty tomb. On Easter morning. The risen Jesus. Appears to them.

On a number. Of occasions. Before he is finally. Lifted up. From their sight. In a cloud. And into God's. Nearer presence.

In glory. The great. Scottish theologian. Tom Torrance. Taught me. As a divinity student. That there is nothing.

Unscientific. About the New Testament's. Account. Of the ascension. Of Christ. To heaven. The ascension. Happens at the very.

Boundary. Of time. And eternity. We live. As humanity. Within God's. Created universe. Of time. And space. In describing.

[13:24] Christ's ascent. To heaven. We have to use. The language. Of time. And space. And stretch it. To its very limit. Here. I'm going to ask.

Alison now. To put up. This mural. I want you to imagine.

This mural. Here we are. This is a mural. Painted on the wall. Of a church.

In Senegal. In West Africa. There isn't. It captures. The tension. Of the ascension.

On the left panel. And the middle panel. You see. The disciples. As Christ. Prepares. To leave them. And ascend to heaven. And so this artist.

[14:22] In Africa. Captures that moment. In the top right hand. Of the middle panel. You see the feet. Disappearing.

Into the cloud. That's as far. As we can go. As human beings. Within this created world. That drive. Christ's attention. But in the right hand panel.

The artist. Portrays Christ. The risen. Ascended Christ. In glory. In heaven. This mural. From a church.

In Senegal. In West Africa. Captures that tension. As we wrestle. To understand. Christ's ascension. The risen Christ. Disappears. From the disciples. Sight. In a cloud.

But God. Our creator. Is beyond time. And space. In eternity. And so we use. Theological language. To say. The risen Christ. Has ascended. To heaven.

[15:16] This is a mystery. At the limits. Of our understanding. But it is. An essential part. Of the Easter message.

Our hope. Lies. In the ascension. Of the risen Christ. To the right hand. Of God. In heaven. You see. God the Father.

Not only raised. His beloved son. From death. By the power. Of the Holy Spirit. God also. Raised him. To glory. In his ascension. To heaven.

This is the crowning. Of God's son. In glory. After he walked. The way. Of humility. On earth. And the way.

Of humiliation. On the cross. That is why. Jesus taught us. To say. In the Lord's prayer. Your kingdom. Come on earth. As it is.

[16:12] In heaven. If God's kingdom. Has already come. In heaven. As the ascended. Christ. Reigns there. How will God's kingdom.

Come now. On earth. After Christ's. Resurrection. And ascension. To heaven. Paul tells us. How. In the fourth chapter. Of Ephesians.

And in verse eight. When he ascended. On high. He gave gifts. To his people. See. We're not left alone.

To get on with it. The risen. And ascended. Christ. In glory. Continues. To care. For his church. On earth. By pouring out. His gifts. On us.

What are those gifts? First. And foremost. As we shall celebrate. Next Sunday. At Pentecost. The gift. Of the Holy Spirit. God's loving spirit.

[17:07] Present. And moving. Among us. To empower us. To live together. In love. As God's people. But with that great gift. Of the Holy Spirit.

The ascended. Christ. In heaven. Also gives. To his church. Those gifted. To be apostles. Prophets. Evangelists. Pastors. And teachers. Like your own.

Beloved. And minister. And minister. Gordon. With their faithful. Witness to Christ. In all the scriptures. What do they all bring. To Christ's church.

With their different. Gifts. Paul is very clear. The ascended. Christ. Has given. These gifted. Ministries. To his church. To prepare you. For your service.

To your neighbor. So that this body. Of Christ. In this place. Might be built up. As a loving community. And to.

[18:29] A goal. Ahead of us. 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. When we speak of growth. In the church. We so often think of. Numbers. When the New Testament. Speaks of growth.

It speaks of growth. In love. And maturity. Becoming more Christ-like. In our life. And in our service. To others. In other words.

The risen and ascended. Christ. In glory. Has given. Given these gifts. Of the Holy Spirit. And these diverse. Ministries. From the apostles. To your minister.

Gordon. To enable his church. To live a life. Worthy of your calling. In Jesus Christ. We are not alone.

[19:27] It is not up to us. In calling us. To live a life. Worthy of our calling. As the people of God. Our ascended Lord. Has given us. The resources.

We need. To enable us. To live that life. In his strength. Not ours. The life-giving oxygen.

Of the Holy Spirit. Has come from the ascension. Island. We call heaven. To bring us life. On the little Tristan de Kuna. We call him.

Rescued by such a savior. Who would not. Who would not live. A life. Worthy. Of our calling. Let us pray.

Ascended Lord. Whoever lives. To pray for us. Here. In Craig Lockhart. Lord. We bring. Our community.

[20:27] Our life together. And our own. Walk with you. And consecrate them now. At your throne. Use us.

Even us. To spread. The good news. Of your love. In this community. And city. And to bring glory. To God. Our Father.

In your precious name. We ask this. And for your sake. Amen.