

Sermon - 12 October 2025

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Date: 12 October 2025

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Our rock and redeemer. Amen. Please be seated. Amen.

And I probably, I just thought maybe people don't know what I'm supposed to, you know. So now I'm educating you so you can better keep me accountable. All right.

Sermon, our text this morning is going to be in Ephesians chapter 4 and in Luke 14. Ephesians 4, it's on page 1161 of your P.U. Bible, your church Bible, and the Luke passage, the gospel, is on page 1038.

I invite you to follow along. Remember last week, last Sunday's reading, we read Paul's letter to the Ephesians as well. Paul there appeals to his sufferings as the strongest proof of his faith and devotion.

In last Sunday's reading, he wrote to the Ephesians. He says, do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which are your glory. My tribulations are your glory.

[1:34] Paul rejoiced in his afflictions. And not only because he counted it an honor to suffer for Christ, but because he knew and he knows that his chains themselves, in his chains themselves, he's sharing in the power of the cross.

That is, that his chains, even the very chains that he has, shared in the power of the cross. He knows, unlike maybe the people around him, that the chains themselves were not entrances to the gospel.

But in fact, they were instruments of the gospel. Instruments in the hand of God in spreading the kingdom of his Lord. And so, when Paul longed to go to Rome, and God willed that he should go, that he should testify there, in his power, the way opens for him to go to Rome.

But, how did the way open for Paul? It was through imprisonment. He went to Rome as a prisoner. And when he arrived there, he could say to the church, as he writes, my chains have become known throughout the whole palace, the whole praetorium.

My chains have become known. He speaks of his chains as an instrument of the gospel. And even, he added, he said, many of the brothers have become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment.

[3:01] This is how Paul sees his predicament. He even wrote, even before King Agrippa, Paul declared, if you remember in Acts, as he stood before King Agrippa in Judea, before he was taken to Rome, he said, I wish that you and all who hear me become as I am.

He's saying that to them. Can you imagine a man who was an imprisonment, saying, I wish you were like me. Except for these chains, he added. Because he recognizes that he is more free and more liberty than even the king that stands before him.

Because of who he belongs, who he is. What power is there in such a word for a man who is in prison to say that? What he means, of course, is that I will not wish my suffering on you, but I would to God that you might share the blessings of Christ with me.

I would that you would know Christ as I know him. And the comfort and joy and the peace of being known by him. And so in Jerusalem, his chains made a governor, as he stands before a governor of the region in Jerusalem.

His chains made the governor tremble and the king astonished. Remember that even on the way to Rome, at sea, even in the storm, his chains even seemed to bind the storm.

[4:30] And the ship was given into his care. In the island where they were shipwrecked, he shook up the serpent unharmed. This was the ministry of Paul. Unencumbered by this myriads of circumstances that befell him.

Single-minded to serve the Lord and to make whatever situation he finds himself as an instrument for the preaching and the expanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So in Rome, he says, these same chains help make the world captive to the obedience of Christ. And now when he writes to the Ephesians, he says, I, the prisoner, not the prisoner of Caesar, not the prisoner of the emperor, he refers to him as I, the prisoner of the Lord. He reminds his readers, not only of his testimony, but also of the very nature of the Christian calling. To humble oneself for love's sake. To humble oneself for love's sake. And so he calls them. After reminding them who he is, a prisoner of the Lord, he calls them. I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

[5:51] Of course, we know this, right? When Paul writes to the Ephesians, he's writing to them, but the letter to the Ephesians is to the Ephesians. I've said this before, I think. But it's for us, not just for the Ephesians alone.

And so as Paul says it here, I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, he's not talking to the Ephesians alone. He's talking to us, gathered here, on 4876 on Ondago Road.

He's talking to the Church of Christ, those who belong to Jesus. And one can only imagine the weight of these words, the weight that they carry when spoken by one who is literally suffering for Christ.

Paul wished his hearers to be bound as well, as he has been bound. Not with iron chains, mind you. Not iron chains binding their hands and feet, but he wants them to be bound, like he is, with the golden chain of love that binds hearts to one another and binds hearts to God, as it was with Paul. Paul, this was the thing that binds Paul. He could care less about the chains. He is bound to his Lord with that golden chain of love.

[7:09] And he's bound to the Church of Jesus Christ, to brothers and sisters in Christ. He's bound to them. And so he says to the Ephesians, I hope that you will walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.

Make every effort then, he writes to them, to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Notice that he's not saying to them, you must make and create the unity in the bond of peace. What is he asking them to do? Merely maintain it. Merely make every effort to keep it. It's already been done. You've been unified. You've been united.

No Jew or Greek. No Jew or Gentile. No male or female. You are one in Christ. All you must do now is to maintain that unity that has been won for you by your Lord.

The unity Paul encourages us to aspire to is the same unity our Lord prayed for us in his high priestly prayer in John's Gospel when Jesus said that they may be one as we are one.

[8:23] This is the same unity that Paul is asking and encouraging us to walk and aspire to. As the human body and all its members are held together by one life, Paul says, one spirit, so the church of God is one body animated by the same one spirit, the Holy Spirit.

There is one body and one spirit just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

What stronger bond could there be than the one that binds us to God and to one another in God's family? There is none. It is a chain no human power can forge.

Do you hear that? It's this love that Paul talks about. No human power can forge it. Neither can there be any human power that can break it. For God Himself, God Himself is that chain that binds us together.

And God is love. He is the love that binds us. In heaven, that bond cannot be broken. For there is love. For there love is perfect and eternal.

[9:47] And we long to be there where there is no threat to that love. And we just grow in increasing, ever increasing measure.

But here on earth, this love, though it may grow stronger, sometimes it can easily be torn apart by pride.

Pride is the root of human rebellion against God. And that same pride threatens to tear apart the love that binds us to God. Because pride seeks after its own end.

pride aims, pride's aim is self-love. Even at the cost of others. It is the opposite of love.

True Christ-like love, which is agape love, which is self-giving love, which is emptying of yourself for the sake of the other. Resembling your Father in heaven.

[10:53] That kind of love is the antithesis of pride. It's the opposite of pride. So when pride enters, the bond of peace is shattered. Only humility can preserve this bond of unity.

Each person, as Paul writes, esteeming others better than themselves. That's the heart of love and that's a humble heart of love.

that destroys pride. Each person esteeming others better than themselves. But pride, as Job said, binds us about as the color of our coat.

Pride itself can be a bondage. It binds you and makes you slave to yourself rather than flee to God. we cannot be fully rid of it. We know this. At least I'll speak for myself. I cannot be fully rid of pride as long as I'm in this old man, this earthly nature, this fleshly bound.

[12:08] I cannot be fully rid of pride. Our earthly nature lies in the dust and the new self. as long as we live by that earthly nature, we cannot be freely rid of it.

But we have the power to be rid of it. The world does not. But if you're in Christ, you have the means and the power because you have been renewed.

You are to live by a new nature. You are to die to the old man. be renewed in Christ in your new self and as you do so live wholly in Christ.

So that's what Paul encourages us to do. To walk in this manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. You've been called to love.

The love of Christ binds you. The love of God. A change that cannot be broken. That's what binds you to God and binds you to your brothers and sisters in this room.

[13:18] And brothers and sisters who name Christ as Lord all over the world. And our gospel reading gives us a better picture of this as our Lord himself exemplified what it is to live out in this love.

And so we turn to our gospel reading Luke 14. Our Lord has taught us that the true keeping of the law was through love. This is what he accuses the Pharisees about.

They were intent on keeping the law. They were not bound by love for God to whom they were called to obey or bound by love to those whom they are called to serve.

And our Lord teaches that the true keeping of the law is in the field on the grounds of love. Love for God shown in love for one's neighbor.

Jesus did not teach by words alone. He shows us how we are to do that. He revealed that love through action. And so in this gospel reading we're told on the Sabbath day what is the day that symbolizes the rest of God.

[14:27] As Christians our Sabbath is the Lord's day and resurrection day Sunday. The same law and the same command to come and rest is still binding on us.

And so this is the day that symbolizes the rest of God. And so Jesus often decides to heal people on this day. And who hates that? The Pharisees.

The lawyers. The scribes. And he so often chose to heal. And so where is he? And he does so to show the love that fulfills the law and brings true rest to the soul.

And so we're told that entering the house of a ruler of the synagogue. Right? And by the way this is also instructive to us. Jesus knows that the Pharisees are his enemies.

Or at least he loves them but they hated him. What does he do? He still goes into their homes to eat with them. So entering the house of a ruler of the synagogue Christ's heart was again moved with compassion.

[15:43] But the Pharisees watched him with eyes of suspicion. Imagine you're in a place where most of the people there are looking at you waiting for you to do something wrong. Do you think our Lord was disturbed?

No. They watched him with eyes of suspicion. Imagine such looks and suspicion if it was turned towards you. It might kill you. You're so self-conscious.

And what do you often become? People pleasers. well let me speak for myself. I don't want to speak for you. But the tension is to become people pleasers. You know they're looking at you. You know they're judging you.

And you don't want to run afoul. But that is not the way of our Lord. And how does it happen for us when we move to love?

We move to love like Christ loves. To be the hands and feet of Christ to a lost world. But then we see the scorn of Pharisees of our age. The Pharisees are still around.

[16:50] When you see their scorn and they're looking at you with suspicion. And I should add this. Oftentimes it's become customary to say the Pharisees are in the church. Because the Pharisees of Jesus day were religious folks.

Well I don't actually think that's the case. I mean there are Pharisees in the church. Don't get me wrong. But there are Pharisees in our society. I think there are more Pharisees outside the church than there are in the church. Our culture is a Pharisee culture.

Constantly you're being judged. You run afoul of the Pharisee standards of our culture. Don't say the wrong thing. Don't love the wrong people.

Don't be kind to the wrong people. Make sure that you ate The things we ate! love the Pharisee culture.

Those are the kind of Pharisee culture that we live in. What does it mean to live like Christ in love? What does love look like the way Christ exemplified?

[17:54] Love means telling the truth. Love means living by the truth. Love means honoring God rather than men.

love and so what happens to us oftentimes when we are inclined to love like Christ loves, to be hands and feet of Christ to a lost world, and we see the Pharisee scorn looking at us suspiciously, sometimes it grips us into paralysis.

And instead of stepping out to intervene as Christ would, we too often sit on our hands and remain inactive because we don't want to run afoul.

of the Pharisees of our day. But it was never so with Jesus. Jesus, Luke tells us, and behold, there was before him, before Jesus in the house of this ruler of the Pharisees.

I even wonder if they planted this man there. Wondering what Jesus would do. I don't know, we're not told. But there was a man there who had dropsy.

[19:03] This healing man had excessive fluid in his body. This is what dropsy is. At least it's a very painful situation. And eventually it ends in death.

And he would have been in pain. And Jesus perceiving their thoughts asked, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? He asked them, what do you think?

Is it lawful to deliver this man out of his pain on the day of rest? As we all come to rest in God's rest?

Is it lawful to love this man on a Sabbath day? And what did they do? They were silent. That silent was a great indictment of them.

But what did Jesus do? He took the man, healed him, and then he let him go. After healing the man, Jesus asked, is it lawful to heal?

[20:08] The religious leaders said nothing. They were silent. They were trapped in their own rules. Laws that were meant to guide them to love of God and love of neighbor.

But their rules have instead become changed around them, keeping them from a heart of compassion and love. And so Jesus comes to them to feast with them, but Jesus never sets aside his compassion and his love.

One person in need in the vicinity of Jesus drew his heart more than all the guests of honor were seated around him. And here we learn the law of love as our Lord exemplifies it.

The law of love is to notice, to think of, and to help those who need us most. This is how Jesus lives. He noticed the destitute and the weak and the oppressed.

He had compassion for them. He thought of them and he moved towards them. What are our inclinations, brothers and sisters?

[21:27] And what comfort is it to know that this is the nature of our Lord? Because this man would drop seed in this story. That's who we are.

If you think about it, I hope we're not the Pharisees sitting in judgment. Of course, we're not Christ in this story either. We are the person in need, in pain, in need of healing, in need of relief, in need of love.

And what comfort is it to know that this is the heart and disposition of our Lord? That he moves towards us in our pain? need of what comfort is it to know that God's heart is always turned towards those who are needy?

Our weakness itself is enough to draw out his mercy. He watches and waits to heal. He comes precisely as we read a few weeks ago for those who are sick, not for those who are healthy.

What comfort it is to know that Christ turned to a deeper sickness. Here's a man sick with dropsy.

[22:43] Christ has healed him. And then he turns to the Pharisees. They had a deeper sickness, a more insidious healment. The pride of their hearts kept him from assessing this love of Christ, this love of God that knows no bound.

Jesus turned to them. You know, bodily illness is one thing. The pride that calluses our hearts and keeps us from tapping into the love of God and loving one another is a whole other thing in itself. And it's more insidious, more dangerous, and we must root it out. And this is the pride that lies at the heart of the Pharisees. It lies deep within their soul, stifling the love of God.

The old serpent of self-importance strangles the dove of God's spirit in their hearts. And so Jesus, the physician, comes to them and tries to work in them, to heal them of this great ailment, if they will only listen, have ears to hear.

So, observing how the guest chose the best seat, Jesus goes and tells this parable to sort of reveal the state, to dissect the state of their heart.

[24:07] He tells this parable. When you are invited to a wedding of peace, do not sit in the place of honor, Jesus says. Let someone more distinguished than you be invited. And your hostess, you give this man your seat.

And then with shame, you take the lowest place. But when you are invited, what should you do? Take the lowest place, so that your host may say to you, friend, move up higher, for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

The Lord's words may sound like mere politeness here, and you may read it as just mere polite advice, but the words are far more deeper. They are meant to dissect the state of our soul.

They mirror into our hearts. Jesus invites us to take the lowest seat only in the hope of being raised higher. But this kind of humility is not just mere hypocrisy either.

It's not just, oh, take the lowest seat so that you know they're going to come and tell you to come up and come together higher seat, and then you look even more important. That's not what Jesus is, that's not the prophecy that Jesus is alluding to.

[25:21] He's saying true humility, true humility, true humbleness of the heart finds joy in being forgotten. True humility finds contentment in remaining lowly for the love of God.

true humility looks like serving your brothers and sisters, and sometimes no one knows.

There is no fanfare for you, for you serve faithfully. True humility looks like teaching the young ones in this parish to know and love the Lord.

True humility looks like serving your brothers in St. Andrew's Hall, cleaning up after them. True humility might look like looking at that young mother who has a lot of kids around her, and taking one of them and saying, let me give you some time so you can sit and quiet and listen to God's word.

True humility looks like seeing your brother be set by one trouble or the other. and drawing closer to them rather than moving away.

[26:47] You're not doing it so that you be called to move up higher. You're doing it because that is the heart of Christ. The Lord's words, this is what Jesus means, and this is what Jesus has done for us.

This is what he's trying to teach these proud men. And he's rebuking them. You've hardened your hearts. Instead, he wants them to humble and to soften their hearts.

And he speaks this gentle parable to them, that they may do so. He offers them a lesson that even pride could not despise by appealing to their desire for honor.

He led them as they were, and he wants to do so for us, that we may ponder upon his words this morning, and have true knowledge of what true humility looks like. And perhaps some of them may have left that feast saying to themselves, if I truly seek honor, why does he tell me to sit in the lowest place?

And perhaps they began to understand that he spoke not of earthly tables. At the root of it, it's not earthly tables that Jesus was speaking of. Jesus was speaking of the invitation to the great banquet in the kingdom of God.

[28:09] Where every place is given by the host himself, and where the lowly are called to sit nearest to the master. At that banquet feast, there is no low table.

We all sit in the presence of our Lord and Redeemer as we feast with him. You know, there are many ways to show humility today.

There are many ways also to show humility in Jesus' day. Jesus told many parables about humility. In one parable, it's taking the lowest seat. In another, it is the publican who dares not raise his head as he's in the temple beating his chest and saying, have mercy on me, a sinner.

In another, it's the prodigal son who says, I am not worthy to be called your own, your son. In

another parable of Jesus is the woman who loved much because she was forgiven much.

And so she lavished a precious, most precious possession on Jesus. And yet in another, those who at the last day will ask and wonder, Lord, when did we see you hungry and thirsty and serve you?

[29 : 21] And what would the Lord say to them? When you did it to these little ones, you did it to me. All of these examples of humility point to one truth.

The soul's greatness is in its lowliness before God. There's a holy mystery that we must grasp.

Humility lies at the very heart of our faith.

It's woven into what Christ himself has done for us. In coming, lowering himself. Not counting equality with God, something to be achieved.

Lowering himself to take on human flesh and going even further down to the cross. So he can bear our shame and our guilt and our condemnation upon himself.

So that we may be justified and set free. And this kind of humility is better, it's safer to know and feel.

[30 : 27] it's really not definable. I've given you some examples, but it's ultimately a posture of our hearts towards God and towards one another.

God and what we can say is this, no grace can live in a soul that lacks humility. No grace can live in a soul that lacks, there's no love of Christ, the true love of Christ that can live in a soul that lacks, pride brothers and sisters, kills love.

It stifles it and change it. Our Lord taught us again and again by his words, by his parables, by his own life and ultimately by his death that he humbled himself from heaven to earth that we might learn to humble ourselves before God and one another.

And whatever this parable may teach us, it surely speaks of our place at the Lord's table. Brothers and sisters, you will come to the Lord's table. Do you think you come in your own power, in your own righteousness, in your own worthiness?

Of course you know you don't. You come humbly to the Lord who has humbled himself so that you may come to him. You come most humbly, most aware of your own unworthiness.

[31 : 59] You come knowing that you are not worthy to pick up the scraps under his table. But you know that this is the same Lord whose character is to have mercy.

What does he do? He beckons you to come. He draws you near to himself. He says, come so that I may sustain you, so that I may give you life.

Feed on me. do not look to yourself this morning. Do not rest in your own righteousness.

Look to him. Come to him lowly in heart, knowing that his love is strong enough to draw and to keep you.

lastly, let us then go back to St. Paul's charge, to work worthy of this calling that we have received.

[33 : 03] With all humility and gentleness, let us walk worthy of it. Bound together, brothers and sisters, in the unity of the spirit, held fast by the bond of peace and love.

For in the end, the lowest place at the table of Christ, the lowest place at the table of Christ is far higher, far more beautiful, far more significant than the highest seat this world can offer us.

Do you know this? Do you believe it? And know that the chain that binds us to our Lord, this chain of love that binds us to him and to one another, this unbreakable bond of love is God himself.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.