

One Call: One Spirit

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Well, it's great to welcome you to St. John's today, particularly if you're visiting with us. There are a number of visitors with us.

I'm particularly delighted to welcome Dr. Robert Gagnon, who is speaking at Regent Summer School this week, and we're going to be mentioning what he'll be doing on Tuesday night for us here at St. John's.

It's great to have you with us, Robert. Welcome. Welcome. If you're visiting with us, it's our custom at this time in the gathering to open our Bibles. If you grab it in front of you from the pew and open to page 182 near the back, we are right at the midpoint of the book of Ephesians.

One of my sons loves mathematics, and when he just learned to speak, his questions were never, what's the biggest, tallest, longest, shortest, highest?

His question was always, what is the middlest? What is the middlest building in New York, Daddy? What is the middlest aeroplane? And of course, I haven't got a clue, but I...

[1 : 10] You make it up, don't you? Well, here we are in Ephesians. We've done chapters 1 to 3. We're going to go into chapters 4 to 6, and the middlest word in Ephesians is there in chapter 4, verse 1, therefore.

Some years ago, the Short family went camping around Idaho and Wyoming, and to get from Idaho Falls to Jackson's Hole, you have to climb 8,000 feet to a saddle in the Teton Mountains.

Our car had more things in it than we possibly could imagine or ask or think, both inside the car and on top, and we crawled our way to the top, and when you get to the top, there is the most glorious view, looking forward and looking backwards, a saddle in the range.

And you're met by a sign, I have photographic evidence, that says, howdy, stranger, yonder is Jackson's Hole, the last of the Old West, just in case you arrived there by accident.

And then you go down the hill, we're past the RVs with their brakes smoking, using all sorts of different parts of your car. Now, the book of Ephesians is a little bit like that.

[2 : 26] It breaks out into two halves, and in the first half, we climb through the teaching of the Apostle Paul, speaking about all that God has done for us. And we come to chapter 4, and the second half of the book is practical application of what it means to belong to God and all that God has done in Jesus Christ.

It's basically about what we are to do. They're not equal halves. You can't get the second half unless you come through the first half. And the first half can be summarised in one word, the riches of his grace, and the second half, therefore you.

And there's nothing dry, academic, or just systematic about the first three chapters. If you've been reading it, you'll know it is a spontaneous, contagious, infectious hymn of praise to God for the riches of his grace to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1, we hear about the riches of his grace, the immeasurable riches of his grace. Chapter 2. Chapter 3, the unsearchable riches of Christ. Or chapter 3, the riches of his glory.

And I think there is only one real way, there's only one proper way that we can speak about what God has done for us, and it's through the voice of praise. When we were absolutely blind to the glory of God, when we were dead in our sins, says the Apostle Paul, we couldn't give one cent for what God thought.

[4 : 09] God, in his love, chose us in Christ, sent his Son to die for us, to redeem us, and now he has raised us in Christ, and he's building us together in a body to be the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

We are part of something that outlasts this creation, something through which God is working, a group through which God is demonstrating his wisdom in the world. It is an incredibly high calling.

You have been called from death to life. You and I have been called to be the dwelling place of God in the world, the place of his wisdom, purely because he's lavished the riches of his grace to us. So when we come to chapter 4, verse 1, we reach the saddle and the fulcrum, and I read it for you, verse 1, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

Therefore, this is the Bible logic. This binds the first half of the book to the second. What God has done with what we are going to do. Because Bible belief and Bible behaviour must go together.

[5 : 33] I think some of us here, I know some of you prefer chapters 4 to 6. They're so practical, they're so down to earth, they're full of application. Don't give me all that theology and doctrine.

Just tell me what to do. I don't want to study all this stuff. I just want to get out there and act on my faith. But Paul says, riches of grace, therefore you.

And I know some of you prefer the first three chapters. And as we come to these last four chapters, you say, yes, yes, yes, the application is easy, I know all this. And I'm a little bit suspicious of too much experience.

I want to be able to sniff out false teaching at a hundred paces and split theological hairs with my laser Bible knowledge. And Paul says, the lavish grace of God, therefore you.

By the way, I think people probably think St. John's is in the second category more than the first, don't you? They think that we're more intellectual than practical. And if they're right, we need to repent.

[6 : 40] Because we must never study the teaching of God. We must never study or believe the doctrine of God unless it leads to praise and to practice.

Theology and life are one thing. Still, I need to say that if we take away the first half, if we take away the first three chapters, chapters four to six make no sense whatsoever.

If I was to come here week by week and just tell you what to do and what not to do, it would fast become hard, dull, crushing legalism.

And if all that I was to do was just to preach the doctrine without application, we would become soft, stuffed, with spiritual indigestion.

I think that's why Paul deliberately mentions in this verse that he is writing from prison. Because following Jesus, becoming a Christian, has very real and very practical consequences.

[7 : 42] And they're not all to make us happy and successful. You don't become a Christian for God to fix all your problems and give you a happy West Coast life and add on a little bit of nice spirituality on top.

We follow Jesus because we have begun to see the glory of God in his face. We are convinced that there is something in the Lord Jesus Christ which is utterly, utterly glorious and that what God is doing and has done for us in him is infinitely more important than any person or any position or any privation.

Joining the church is not signing up to a club, a private members club where you get a secret handshake and access to luxury benefits that begin to make us feel better than other people like Air Miles programs do.

We join the church because we are amazed that God has loved me and he's given us the opportunity to enter into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and to live out and to show something of the wonder of Jesus and how lavish his grace is towards us.

Christianity is more than ticking boxes. It's more than belief. It's more than saying, yes, I believe in God. Yes, I believe he died. Yes, I believe he's coming again. It's a way of life. It's a way of living.

[9 : 00] It's a path which has boundaries on it where we follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the good news of God in Jesus Christ. It creates new people and if our lives and if our decisions and if our ethics do not arise from the gospel, we don't yet belong to Jesus.

The Bible never says, love your brother, it's just the right thing to do. It never says, be nice or else you'll get it. It says, love your brother, love your enemy because you have the life of Christ within you.

Our ethics, all our ethics come from what God has done and who God is. They are therefore ethics. Which means, of course, if we're struggling with some area of application, it may be and it usually is because we haven't understood something of the lavish grace of God towards us.

That is why Paul begs us to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called. You don't become a Christian by suddenly deciding one day, I'll give Jesus a shot.

I'll turn over a new leaf. I'll try this Christianity thing. You become a Christian when you hear God calling you by name. You hear the voice of God through the gospel saying, come and follow me. [10:27] That is the way all the lavish blessings of God become real in my heart and in your heart. It says you hear the voice of God calling you. It's the Lazarus experience.

Remember Lazarus? Four days dead in the tomb and after four days he heard the power of the voice of Jesus Christ calling from beyond the grave, calling him back into this life.

So it is for us. We were dead in our sins when the power of Jesus' word called us back to life. For some of you it happened when you were children. For some of us it's taken a very, very long time and it's a process and we never have a Damascus Road experience but we look back and we say, I know God has called me because I hear his voice and I'm drawn to him and I follow him and I see the glory in Jesus Christ.

Others of you have described it to me as being hit by a four by two and that's not been my experience but maybe some of us need that experience.

Incidentally, because of the word calling here, for us as Christians there is only one calling.

[11:41] There's a confusion about this today. We use this word as though I'm called to be an architect, I'm called to be a software engineer whereas David here, he's called to be a minister.

In the Bible there is only one call we're all called to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. We're all called to move towards the one hope. We're all called to serve the one Lord, doesn't matter what profession we are in.

And it's that call of God that makes us look so strange in any given culture because you and I decide what is right and wrong not by some personal moral compass that we have developed, not even a golden compass.

We decide what's right and wrong by what God has done in Jesus Christ. I know some people prefer rights and freedoms to right and wrong but it all boils down to the same thing.

Most people make decisions in this area on one of four grounds. They say I'm going to decide these things based on some rules, either rules that I was taught or rules that I've developed for the way the world goes round.

[12:49] Other people make decisions looking forward to the consequences of my action. Still others look at the situation and say, well how can my decisions arise out of this situation? And fourthly, people say, well my motive is the really important thing.

And all of those are important and all of them are helpful but for those who follow Jesus Christ there is something much more important. It is the therefore. It's what God has done in Jesus Christ.

So the primary issue for us in deciding what to do and how to do it is the character, the person, the life, the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ. We belong to him.

We have been placed in him. We have come to new life in him. Just let me show you some illustrations of how this works out. Look down at chapter 4, verse 25 for a moment please, in a dangerously practical section just over the page 183.

Verse 25. Therefore, chapter 4, verse 25, putting away falsehood, let everyone speak the truth with his neighbour. Why?

[14:00] For we are members one of another. Why should we be truthful with each other? It's a nice thing, builds trust, it obeys the commandment.

the reason that the Apostle Paul gives us here and for all who follow Jesus Christ is because we are members one of another. Do you see the logic?

We have been brought into the same body of Jesus Christ. The same life is flowing through us. We are members one of another. Or look down at chapter 4, verse 32.

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another. Lovely. Why? As God in Christ forgave you.

The reason we act this way is because of who God is and what he has done for us. So you see, our whole moral, ethical, social lives as Christians are determined by the grace of God and the logic of the therefore.

[15:04] and what that means is we will be, it means we'll look odd. It means that in this culture and in every culture we will be profoundly in step with the culture on some things and profoundly out of step with the culture on other things.

We will look like radical subversives on some things and on others mind-numbingly conservative and on others we'll be right at the centre of the curve for about a week.

All because we are seeking to live a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called. Well, in the minutes left I want to just look with you verses 2 to 6 and ask this question, what is the first priority then of this new life?

Let's imagine you were writing Ephesians and you got to this point and you'd been speaking about the lavish grace of God. what would you call believers to as their first priority?

I'm not sure I would have chosen what Paul does. Verse 2 With all lowliness and meekness with patience forbearing one another in love eager it's a very strong word eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

[16:26] Here it is. This is what comes to the top of the list. He says you are to be eager to work hard to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

I wonder if that's your top priority. Ask yourself what have I done in the last 14 days to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace?

What am I planning to do this fall with my life to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace?

It's a very specific kind of unity. It's the unity of the spirit.

It's not a vague general sense of niceness that's not going to offend or challenge or transform anything. It is the unity that God is bringing about under the person of Jesus Christ.

This is the plan of salvation to unite all things under him because what our pride and what our sin does is it separates us from God and divides us from each other.

[17:27] So, to maintain the unity, to work at maintaining the unity of the spirit is to work to promote the one faith, the one Lord, the one God. It's to align ourselves with God's purposes and it's to take deliberate steps to do all that honour God and the Holy Spirit.

How do we do that? Well, verse 2, with all lowliness, meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love.

This is terrific stuff. You see, the only way that we can promote unity is through humbly bearing with one another in love.

And I know this is shocking news to you. There's no such thing as a perfect church. There's no such thing as a sinless Christian. And if you have not discovered that yet, you couldn't have been at St. John's for long.

The people sitting around you and the people out front of you have many faults. And the only way that we can begin to share unity is to act like Jesus does.

[18:31] Here is the thing with pride. Pride is the most sneaky of all things. And pride has this ability to go deep inside and to come out with a kind of religious face, a churchly face.

Pride actually enables me to put down other vices and to become a better moral person so that I might look down on you. And the first step to dealing with pride is to recognise that you are proud and to ask God to reveal himself to you.

See, what is the antidote to pride? It's not hiding it from other people. It's coming to meet God. Because when we come to face to face with God, we begin to see that God is utterly unimaginably beautiful and larger and more gracious and more wonderful and wiser than anything else, anyone else we can imagine.

And all we can do is look up. And as we're looking up, we stop looking down on other people. This is where true lowliness comes from. It's not grovelling or trying to think little thoughts about yourself. It's not thinking much about yourself at all. It's thinking big thoughts of God. But let me... I want to quote something from Chesterton from his book on orthodoxy because I think in our culture we mistake lowliness and meekness for weakness and for capitulation and for peace at any price.

[20:05] Listen to what Chesterton says. He says, what we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition.

Modesty has settled on the organ of conviction where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself but undoubting about the truth.

This has been exactly reversed. Nowadays, the part of man that he asserts is exactly the part he ought not to assert himself and the part that he doubts is exactly the part that he ought not to doubt the divine reason.

Meekness does not mean having weak convictions. Do you remember how Jesus described himself? Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart. And you will find rest for your souls.

[21 : 10] Here is the Son of God with all the authority of God and what does he do with it? He gives it away. He dies on a cross. He suffers. He doesn't retaliate. He uses his power for the benefit of those who couldn't help themselves.

This week I heard a story about Sir Edmund Hillary, the famous mountain climber who was mounting another campaign. He was in Tibet ready to go and a guy saw him and recognised him and asked to be photographed with him.

So he said, sure. Just before the photograph was taken a group of tourists from a country I am not going to name came by and one of the tourists said to him, hey old fella that's no way to hold an ice pick and went over and changed the way that Sir Edmund was holding the ice pick.

notice I didn't do any accents. Sir Edmund just smiled and allowed the photo to be taken.

We see that's meekness. The apostle says what we are meant to do is not stand on our rights.

We're not meant to say to each other you don't know how important I am.

[22 : 22] We're meant to literally bear each other and that assumes that you and I are going to be a weight and a burden to each other. It assumes you are going to be in regular concrete contact with Christian brothers and sisters with whom you're going to have misunderstandings and conflicts and differences and you will be a burden to others just as they will be to you.

Why do we do this? Verse 4 because there is one body one spirit just as you are called to the one hope that belongs to your call.

One Lord one faith one baptism one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all.

We do this because of the one God the one Lord the one spirit the one body. The unity that we have together it doesn't arise from us.

We don't create it. We don't manufacture it. Our job is to maintain it and to enjoy it. There is no real basis for unity apart from Jesus Christ.

[23 : 38] I mean you think about it. What kind of unity could we create apart from the Lord Jesus Christ? A unity based on race or language? A unity based on our niceness or our common goals?

the 20th century is littered with victims of that kind of unity. True unity which is a fundamental human desire it's what we long for is the unity of the Holy Spirit and it is one of the spectacular blessings that God has given us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Two weeks ago I had the privilege of being at the Global Anglican Future Conference. We talked about this last week. After the Bible studies we went into small groups to speak about the implications of what God's word meant and then to pray together.

I had people in my group from four different languages Africa two different African languages from South America two folk from Texas and they're all being translated and we went around the circle and people started to speak about their longing to be in the presence of God their longing to be free from sin their longing to be with each other in heaven.

It was very moving. We had no human reason to be united. It was the unity of the Spirit and I long for us to share that unity together here at St. John's.

[25 : 05] God has lavished his riches on us in Jesus Christ therefore I beg you maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This is Church Belonging 101 and next week we look at how it actually operates in the life of the congregation. Let's bow our heads and pray.

Our great God and heavenly Father we pray that you would widen our hearts and make them larger that we might understand something of the lavish goodness and grace you've poured on us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Forgive us for being so self-centered and by your Holy Spirit bring us closer into the body of the Lord Jesus to experience that unity and to do what we may to maintain and to promote that unity for there is one God one Lord one faith and one hope and we ask this in the one name even Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. together as we pray. Father we are here this morning all of us important to you and to each other as each of us has different qualities and attributes we are dependent on each other but ultimately we are all dependent on you.

[26 : 49] You are the cornerstone of our lives and the one God Father's Son and Holy Spirit in whom we are all joined together. Therefore we can work together in expanding your kingdom as we spread the gospel message in Vancouver and ultimately around the world.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer. As we think of our place in the world we pray for our leaders for the Queen for our Prime Minister our Premier the mayors of our municipalities and for the leaders of our church we pray as well Archbishop Venables Bishops Don and Malcolm and for those on our staff who are committed to you and to the spread of your gospel.

The Anglican Church of Canada we pray and as the Lambeth Conference starts soon we pray for the guidance of your spirit in all that is said and done and that your name will be lifted high for the whole world to see and that your will ultimately will be done in each life.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer. For those in our church who minister locally we ask your blessing. Think of Ritchie with the Navigators and Kirsten with Living Waters.

Give them each the comfort of your spirit as they face obstacles to the spread of the gospel. Give them encouragement as they see fruit in their ministries. help them and us to pray for strength and for guidance.

[28 : 27] And for those also who minister at St. John's for the youth as they're meeting in their summer program may each continue to grow closer to you. Be with the leaders.

Continue to give them the wisdom to know how best to teach and encourage the youth. For they are the future of our church. we thank each for their commitment to you.

And for our pastoral staff we pray for strength to continue in their ministries and may they feel their strength increase as they continue to rely on you for guidance and help us all to support them with prayer and encouragement.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer. For our world we pray for those areas that are in crisis. We pray for political stability in the Middle East and South America and in Africa.

And for those in our church who are sick and hurting we especially pray. We think of Peter, of Harold, Rowena, Marguerite, Fiona, Janet, Gordon, and Carolyn.

[29 : 49] Give them strength, give them healing, and give them grace to accept your will. And for Mehran we pray for a favorable ruling from the immigration board and ask that you would help him to see your hand in this part of his life.

we ask you to make us continually aware of those who have needs in our church and at the same time we thank you for those who meet regularly to pray for our church and its ministries.

And thank you for those who have a ministry of caring for those sick and hurting. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. prayer. And as Paul wrote in Colossians, Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Amen.