

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Daris Bultena

August 2, 2009

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ephesians 4:1-16

¹I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

⁷But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." ⁹(When it says, "He ascended", what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until 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. ¹⁴We 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. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knitted 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.

John 6:24-35

²⁴So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

²⁵When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" ²⁹Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? ³¹Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³²Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not

Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."
³⁴They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

"Wilderness Ware"

Jesus told them, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

"...for the food that endures for eternal life." Endures. Eternal Life. Both words and concepts can be far from us. We tend to think of eternal life as that which is way out there. We think of it as that which is beyond—when I dare say it is more about the kind of life God has for us even in the now of this moment. Endures—ah, we tend to make that about something that lasts, something that has longevity. Endures, however, has more to do with depth of reach.

This idea of enduring has more to do with what we will do when we get lost. It has to do with how we will handle life in the wilderness. There can be different concepts of the wilderness—but really the wilderness is any place in life where we are not on the well worn path. There are times when those forays off the beaten path are welcome. Indeed it can be adventuresome to go somewhere one has not ever gone before.

It is great for a car trip to take the scenic route, but generally where the wilderness is, where those places in life where we get lost are ...those are not the places of enjoyment. Rather the lost places, the off the known path places, the wilderness places—ah, the places where we end up are places of struggle and question. They are places of doubt and caution.

Most of the times such place are not places we would choose. They are places we end up. Where have we ended up? What is it that we are

dealing with that we had not planned on dealing with? How is that we are struggling again? Just how did this happen? How did we get here? --ah, these are the questions we have in the wilderness.

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Faithfulness is not about avoiding the wilderness—but rather raises the question that Jesus raises about working for that which endures for eternal life when we end up in such places.

I dare say that we tend to want to avoid the wilderness. We tend to like to have things be rolling along positively and how we planned. And ending up somewhere in life where we did not plan and we did not want to be is not necessarily our idea of how things should be. Indeed, but such is life.

Let me be clear though, that it is in such places where I believe there is a quality and depth to living that enables us to truly taste the Bread of Life and have those Eternal Life experiences that are authentic and vibrantly real. To put it another way—it is in the times in our life when we face our hardest challenges and we struggle the most that we also grow the most, experience the presence of God intensely, and manifest our calling as disciples purposefully.

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There is this sense in reading the book of Ephesians especially, but also in the New Testament more broadly... there is this sense that what living out the Christian life does is it moves us along with a kind of movement that is characterized as a movement “in” or “into Christ.” It is that movement in Christ or into Christ that is of worth noting in our lives.

The times where we struggle, when we are lost, or when we are in the wilderness—those are the times when we can cling to our faith in such

a way that it becomes easier for us to see that there are these wares—this merchandise—these tangible realities that enable our being in Christ and enduring with a kind of living that is both eternal and truly abundant.

Let me call those things, which are of significance, “wilderness wares.”

To do, as a friend of mine always says, “trust the process”—that is a wilderness ware. To trust the process is to have a kind of enduring faith that even, as the psalmist puts it, “in the valley of the shadow of death,”...even there one can stay the course and have trust in the trustworthiness of God.

Trust the process. It is about trusting the One who is above the process—it is about trusting the one who is in all, through all, with all—“one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Lord Jesus Christ.”

So when things come apart—when the economy fails, when the kid messes up, when the sickness surfaces, when the pain arrives—when the come what may comes what may...then and there we trust the process.

To do that is a statement not about us—but about God. It is not, “Oh, I can get through this” or “I can handle this.” No. It is not about confidence in ourselves and our own abilities—it is always about our confidence in God and God’s abilities to show us the way and to help us along the way.

Our confidence is in the One who brings it all together and has the very power over life and even death. When we place our confidence in God—even at our lowest and our highest moments of struggle and/or ease—then we are, if you will, trusting the process.”

Make sure you have that in your recourses—in your wares, your wilderness ware: to trust the process.

Trust the process, yes—a wilderness ware—but also to love. Our most common emotion in the wilderness is fear. We tend to go to fear when we are traversing ground that we have never covered before. We tend to go to fear when we are traveling territory that is uncharted in the course of our life.

And a little fear along the way may not be all that bad—it tends to prompt us to ask a number of questions and it tends to cause us to think about why we are reacting the way we are.

The challenge is to not stay on the emotional side of fear but to move over to the side of love. We also need to be raising those questions about love. What does it mean for you, for me, for us to be love in those places where we are challenged the most? What does it mean for us to embody love and chose love in those places where our buttons are pushed the most? What does it mean for us to become love—to actively choose love as the way when we feel anything but love coming towards us.

That is a wilderness ware—when we take love and dress ourselves in it then it becomes something that we wear! It is a movement toward Christ and into Christ when we wear love.

Let me remind you what I tell young couples on their wedding day. Love is less of an emotion and it is more of a choice. We choose to love. If it is an emotion then it will come and go. We will have it one day and loose it the same day—but love is more than emotion it is a choice. We see that in the nature of God—God chooses to love us. God chooses to love even when we act anything but loveable. God still chooses to love us. And God loves us so much that the love of God is always pursuing us even

at the cost of the Only Begotten Son---God chooses to act in love towards us.

When we are so living into and choosing love—we are enduring in our places of struggle and we are discovering what it means to be filled with eternal and abundant life.

There is for the Ephesians, and for us today still, there is this emphasis on oneness. It a wilderness ware that we have this oneness. To have such oneness is not to stand around and hold hands and just be so happy with each other. That is not really real. I think we think that if we really are one then we will be happy and there won't be any arguments, and there won't be any strife, and there won't be any disagreements. It will just be all smiles and sweetness.

Such is not oneness. Such is niceness. Oneness is the ware we need in the wilderness, not niceness. Nice is like ice—it melts in the heat! It might be sweet to the taste, but it melts in the mouth. I'm not saying its bad—nice is good, go for it, but that which endures is not the niceness it is the oneness.

What does it meant to have such oneness? It is about equipping the saints—we are to have a oneness about that purpose both individually and corporately and as a congregation. There is to be a oneness about equipping the saints.

There are many ways to talk about equipping the saints for ministry—but let me couch it this way: it is about building up the Body of Christ. Are we building each other up? Are we readying each other? Do we support each other and are we looking to each other for that support of living our single purpose and movement toward and into Christ?

Today we elect officers—and we do that not to fill the slots, not to make the church go, and not to have met a requirement. It is not about that. What it is about is changing lives and growing in God’s love. We are equipping each other for the kinds of ministries to which we have been called to in our baptism.

Such is what we are about—our officers in the church and all of us—we are about this purpose of making a difference because God is making a difference. We are about making a better way, because God has done and is doing that in us. Changing our lives and growing in love!

This is all about our oneness—it is about our locating our lives in the living the Christ and so doing that with each other and with those we encounter. We do it in order to be ready and to journey through the wilderness not to merely make it through but rather to endure with a kind of life, an eternal life that feeds us with living bread.

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Even in the wilderness...it wears even there! Amen.