

“Worthy Living”

Ephesians 4:1-6

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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As I'm sure you know, this Wednesday, July fourth, is Independence Day, the day we celebrate the birth of our nation. It's the day in 1776 that congress approved the wording of the Declaration of Independence. John Adams, in a letter to his wife Abigail, said that the passing of the Declaration of Independence “ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever.” If you add hot dogs to the list, 242 years later that pretty well describes the celebrations across the country.

I think we tend to miss the significance, though, of the risk that the original signers were taking. The last line of the Declaration of Independence reads, “for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.” They knew that there was a very real possibility of being executed for treason if they were caught.

Perhaps, though, the thing that may be most surprising is that the Declaration of Independence was adopted *unanimously*. Every one of the members of the Continental Congress pledged his life to the others. These men who came from different states with different occupations and different concerns and different faith traditions were able to come together for the common good. Unanimously. They were able to come together because they had more uniting them than dividing them. They shared the common belief that truth was “self-evident” and that it came from our creator.

Today we live in a very dangerous time in America. Recently we have witnessed public anger and hatred in our country that is alarming, especially when it is encouraged and fueled by elected officials, celebrities, and news organizations. Every week seems to offer a new

issue for people to line up on one side or the other and then shout at each other about. Or worse. We are starting to see more and more political violence and several commentators have said that we are approaching or are even in a form of civil war. I think the thing that troubles me the most is that as Americans we no longer have a common (or at least similar) worldview. Not everyone believes that truth is self-evident. In America today the individual has become more important than the common good.

The only solution, the only source of lasting peace is Jesus. And so I think the Bible is pretty clear that as followers of Jesus you and I have certain responsibilities in situations like we find ourselves these days. This is what we find in this passage from Ephesians 4. Paul writes, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” The obvious question, then, is what is this calling? The answer is twofold. First is what we are called “from.” In Ephesians 2 Paul explains that God calls us from death to life, from hopelessness to hope, from sinfulness to holiness. Paul further explains that God is calling us to leave behind anything that divides us. Hostility has no place in God's Kingdom.

But God is not just calling us “from” something, He's also calling us “to” something. Ephesians 2:18 says, “you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” God is calling us into a new way of life. He's calling us into His church and here He gives us instructions on how to live in a way that is worthy of that calling. Actually, the entire remainder of the book of Ephesians is like an instruction manual on how to be part of Christ's church. And it's important that we pay attention to these instructions because the world is paying attention to what we say and do. God's plan is for the church, and that means

you and me, to influence our communities by offering an alternative to the world's ways.

In verses 2 and 3, God gives us four characteristics of a worthy life. The first is *humility*. Boxing promoter Don King famously said, "I never cease to amaze my own self. And I say that humbly." Umm, that's not humility. In fact it's the opposite. Humility is the opposite of pride. In the Bible, pride is usually a synonym for idolatry. A great definition of humility comes from Philippians 2:3. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." Humility means refusing to insist on your rights and instead putting others' needs ahead of your own. How are you doing with this?

The second characteristic is *gentleness*. Humility and gentleness go hand-in-hand. You might consider memorizing this verse. Proverbs 15:1, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Arguments about politics (or anything else for that matter) require two people willing to argue. You may be right about your position and the other person wrong. But what would it look like if instead of arguing Christians spent their time and energy loving and serving the people we disagree with?

That brings us to the third characteristic Paul mentions – *patience*. If you are going to love and serve people who are so clearly wrong, it's going to take patience. Paul says we are to bear with one another in love. The problem for most of us is that patience must be learned and one of the only ways to learn patience is through suffering. However, you may find it helpful during those seasons when God is trying to teach you patience to remember how patient He is with you. The ability to love someone that we don't want to love is to experience the love God has for you.

The final characteristic is the one to which all the others point: *unity*. Specifically unity in the church. As verse 3 says, we are to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The point Paul is trying to make is that unity is the natural order in God's

Kingdom. We are not called to create unity. It comes from the Holy Spirit. We are called to work to maintain that unity.

Verses 4 through 6 then give us a beautiful picture of what unity looks like in God Himself. "There is one body (the church) and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord (Jesus), one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Did you catch that? The model for unity in the church is the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Next time someone tells you the Trinity is not in the Bible you can humbly and lovingly point them to Ephesians 4.

So back to our original question. What is our calling? It's to demonstrate God's love for the world by demonstrating the unity of God in the Church. Our calling is to love people, especially those who are difficult to love, with humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with each other in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Because the world is watching and listening. I pray that each one of us will demonstrate an alternative to the angry rhetoric, meeting anger with peace, and hate with love. Come to think of it, this may be the best way to celebrate what happened on July 4, 1776.

Amen.