

PP At his inauguration JFK made a call to the nation, a challenge to the nation, it was a call and a challenge that he reminded them of some months later after an historical event. Let's take a look at what happened some 40 years ago. **Video: "When We Left The Earth"—38:00–39:30.** **PP** After John Glenn made his historic flight into space JFK said to the nation that as he had called them to give themselves for their nation, or in his historic words, "Ask not what your country can do for you but rather what you can do for your country" as he called them John Glenn now had shown them what it meant to do a great thing for one's country. But the accomplishment of John Glenn was not the end of the call, either for Glenn or for every other citizen. The journey was just beginning for all. It was a powerful call to give oneself for his country.

PP 2000 years earlier the apostle Paul also issued a powerful call to give oneself away, a call that found its foundation in Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection. God is in the house... *Eph. 4:1 I ... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

PP I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. Just what is the calling to which these people have been called? It is this: to believe in Jesus as the risen Lord and King and to give him complete and undivided allegiance to the rest of lives—at every moment, in every decision, with every word and action, they are to be aware of the call to follow Jesus the Messiah and give him their complete loyalty, this takes precedence over everything else.

The calling, it is by no means a small call. While JFK's call was also a challenge, it is even more of a challenge today in a country where we are constantly asking what can be done for us rather than what we can do for our country, still JFK's call reflected the culture. Paul's call is more challenging for it mixes both culturally acceptable elements and things that his culture absolutely rejected. We get the first hint of this reality when we see the virtues he expects of those who walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they have been called: Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with each other in love. Paul's first virtue, humility, was a quality for which the ancient pagan world had absolutely no use. Pride was one aspired to, getting ahead, being a person of fame, making a name for yourself, being self-reliant, that is what people aspired to. Paul slaps down pride and tells the people that walking in a manner worthy means being people who were humble, in other words, people who we lie on God and follow the example of Christ who humbled himself even to the point of death on the cross. On the other hand, Paul's call to be people of gentleness would be applauded in this day. A gentle person was basically a person you could live with. Rather than being a person of bad temper, sudden anger and the like this person has a friendliness about him. This virtue was seen as a mark of the high-minded and noble, of the cultured and therefore the wise who remained calm even in the face of abuse. The difference for the Christian was mixing humility with gentleness. A true Greek would not allow his gentleness to taking down the path of being belittled. But a Christian who mixed humility with gentleness was will-

ing to follow the path Christ and suffer if it meant the furthering of the kingdom of God. To walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which would've been called means being a person of humility, gentleness, patience; to truly understand what Paul is calling us to we need to understand the picture of God from the Old Testament, God was patient or long-suffering. The picture we find over and over again in the Old Testament is of God restraining his wrath and having his grace and loving-kindness rule. One who is long-suffering or patient is a person who is willing to restrain their anger, even in the face of true wrong, and have grace and loving-kindness rule. Now as we know, even God gets the point where he runs out patience. Patience is not inexhaustible, but Paul lets us know that given what God put up with in the Old Testament we most likely but our patience run out too quickly. Humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love. The shorthand on this one is: put up with each other and those annoyances that come from your differences, and do so in love. Here love is the Greek word, "agape", which means to love another without any expectation of return. So it seems to say to us, put up with each other and don't expect the other person is going to change their annoying differences to make you happy.

PP The call is to believe in Jesus as the risen Lord and King and to give complete and undivided allegiance to him for the rest of our lives. It is a call that is seen in a willingness to live a life of humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love. All virtues which strike us as distinctly not being about our happiness, our fulfillment, or our self-realization. Instead one gets the distinct sense that this is about building a different kind of world where we give ourselves away to build that world. From the biblical perspective we know it's about God and God's kingdom where we give ourselves away in a generous love which constantly refuses to take center stage because we want to follow the command of Christ to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness—knowing that no matter how strange it seems that this is the path to a life worth living.

PP No matter how strange it seems—Paul adds to the strangeness by calling on us not only to live these virtues but to do something else as well, he tells us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Which is another way of saying, "maintain the unity of the church." Paul has a radical and deep concern for unity of the church.

First theological note for the morning: notice Paul does not call upon us to establish the unity of the church, he tells us to maintain the unity of the church or of the Spirit. That's because it is the Spirit who has gathered together the church. We imagine that we have chosen to join the church or for that matter that we have chosen to join a particular local church, but the biblical reality is that the Spirit joins us to the church and calls us to a particular local church. So the unity is established by the Spirit and we are to make it a priority to maintain what the Holy Spirit has begun.

End of theological note number one. Why does Paul insist that maintaining unity is part of being faithful to our call? Why is unity so important to Paul? We might imagine that Paul likes unity because the unified church is just a better church to be in. It is no fun to be in a church whether it's all kind of infighting, anger, struggle and so on. The psalmist in Psalm 133 reflects the joy of being part of a community where there is unity. He writes, **PP** "*Psa. 133:1 Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of*

Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. **PPA** unified community just makes life better and that is no small thing. But we also know more about Paul and his vision. We have seen it over and over again in the book of Ephesians. Paul's vision is a vision that reaches far beyond the walls of the church, it is a vision that focuses not only on the good of the church but to build the world. The church as we have seen over these past few weeks, as pastor Tom pointed out again last week, exists to show the world, the powers and authorities, and the rulers what God is about. Central to this is showing the world that Jesus Christ is Lord.

PP Come back with me to a couple of weeks ago to Ephesians chapter 2. We saw in the chapter that Paul tells us how through the blood of Christ Jew and Gentile had been formed into one new people. Those who would be reading the book of Ephesians in first century would immediately get what Paul is talking about. Here's what's going on: the Roman emperors saw themselves as the true rulers of the world because they're united in their empire people from many different nations. Alexander the Great had seen himself as the true ruler of the world because he brought together Greeks and barbarians into a single Empire. Bringing people together from different nations, tribes, and languages was a way of declaring that you were Lord. In Ephesians 2 Paul shows that the work of Christ draws together the two most divided parts of humankind, Jew and Gentile. Paul writes, *For he himself is our peace, who has made two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.* As Christ does this, as he draws them together he declares that he is Lord to the Roman Empire. But the drawing together is not just about some words on the page, it is about the people who have been rescued from the present evil age living together as one new people. The early church needed to demonstrate that Jesus is Lord by their life together.

PP When the church is unified, when it lives as a unified body it demonstrates that Jesus is Lord and more it declares to the powers of this world that want to force us to live there away, according to their priorities, according to their virtues according to their demands how we are to deal with money sex and power—the church as it was unified life shows that Jesus is Lord, they will follow him at every moment, in every decision, with every word and action they are aware that Jesus is the Messiah and they give him their complete loyalty in all things.

This is why unity is so important Paul. A unified church shows the world how people live in God's kingdom and calls them to serve the Lord of lords and King of kings. But just where is Paul looking for when he talks about a church that is unified? Well we can imagine he's looking for church that's filled with people who are humble, gentle, patient, and to bear with one another in love. But it is also more than this. In a moment Paul is going to reveal just how important unity is by pulling out the big guns, he's going to appeal to the Trinity as the basis for our unity. As he does so he opens the door for us to take a look at Trinity as a picture of what unity looks like in the church.

PP To get that picture will start with theological notes number two, three and four.

Theological note for the morning number two. The word Trinity is never found in the Bible, but what the church believes about the Trinity finds its roots in and comes out of the Bible. Theological note number three. The Trinitarian understanding of God is unique to the Christian faith. There is no other faith that declares there is one God in three persons. As we will see in a couple of moments this unique understanding of God presents us with a God who lives in community. A God who lives in community is distinctly different from the God who was alone. Remember were thinking theologically here, so here's an important comparison between the Trinitarian God and God lives alone: Allah, the God of Islam, Allah, by the way means god in Aramaic--Allah is a solitary being. He exists alone, there is no community, no love given and received at the level of the divine. For this reason followers of Allah will tell you that while Allah gives love, that love is both conditional and it is only something that he does, it is not something that he is. Compare that picture with what John says about God, ⁷*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.* ⁸*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.* ⁹*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.* ¹⁰*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* 1 John 4.7-10 NIV God is not merely someone who gives out love says John, at the very core of his being God is love.

PPTheological note number four. This theological note will lead us to discovering what unity in the church is about. Theological note number four is getting a good picture of the Trinity. First, we need to get a wrong picture out of our head. It's a picture where we see one God who just shows up looking different at different times in history. Let's try this... I've got three masks up here—same person, just shows up in three different ways. That's how a lot of people want to think of the trinity—one God who just shows up with a different mask on, but when you look at the Bible, you just don't get that—what you find is that there are three, separate, distinct persons. After all, you see Jesus praying to the Father, and it would be more than passing strange if he were just praying to himself, and when Jesus tells his followers that he's going to send another comforter, it would be odd if he just came back and said, "I'm the other one I promised". So if three masks don't work, what does? A Family. When we start thinking about God we've got to start thinking of God in terms of a family. There is the father, there is the Son, and there is the Holy Spirit—and they are the perfect family. A family where they love each other perfectly, where they care for each other perfectly, where they share the same goals, desires. Where there is overflowing, other-adoring, self-giving love. So the Father gives everything he has to the son, the Son seeks to bring glory to the Father, and the Holy Spirit seals the love. Neil Plantinga in his article *The Perfect Family* writes, **"Each member of this divine family, though a person is hardly an individual person... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not just members of a generic class of divine persons. They are rather what we would call family members—perfect family members. For in the divine life we find no isolation, no insulation, no secretiveness, no fear of being transparent to another.... Father, Son, and Spirit, the transcendent church family are "members one of another" to an unmatched and perfect degree."**

PP A perfect family where they love each other, care for each other, where they share the same goals and desires. A church that is unified reflects the Trinity. People love each other, they care for each other, and they share the same goals and desires. In other words they are all seeking as individuals and is a body to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they have been called. Unlike the Trinity the church is not the perfect family. If it were most of Paul's letters would never have been written. But in spite of its being an imperfect family, it strives to reflect the life of the Trinity by exercising humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with each other in love.

PP There is one more thing for a church to reflect that Jesus is Lord means that brings together a community of people that are different from one another, that others cannot imagine that these people can be formed into a community. And so a true community of Christ seeks to bring together a diverse group of people. Different personalities, different backgrounds, different nationalities, different political leanings, and so on. When the world sees this kind of community, with all of its diversity, and still sees a community where people love each other, care for each other, and share the same goals and desires—even though they may have different ways of getting to them—the world stands in awe of God who can draw together such people.

PP As we said a moment ago because unity is such a big deal Paul pulls out the big guns and bases are unity in Trinity. He tells us that we are to be one, we are to be unified because there is one Holy Spirit, one Lord, and one God and father of us all. One Holy Spirit meaning it is one Spirit who has brought us together, one Lord in whom we believe in him whom we have been baptized. The second piece, in whom we have been baptized, is huge. Neil Plantinga writes, **PP “A baptized person gets immersed in water or sprinkled with water...in a near death experience that publicly marks her as belonging to Jesus Christ. She is “lowered to death” and is then “raised to life” in an identity-forming event that says to the world, “This is a person who belongs to Calvary, to Easter, to Christ.” Her confession is... These are my events because I belong to the Lord of these events.** **PP** These are my events and the events of every person who belongs to this community. I am connected to them and committed to them because we share the same story, the same Lord, the same Spirit, and there is one God and father of us all. How arrogant it would be of me to imagine that unity is unimportant or that I can stand apart from or above this community we all share one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of us all.

PPP Paul has a call, it is a call to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called. A walk which takes us on a journey to life in the new community, a community the world does not understand as it stands before the world declaring that Jesus Christ is Lord. The path for those in this community to live in this way is the path of developing Christian virtues—humility, gentleness, patience—knowing that none of them can be developed or held onto when things get really tough in the community unless they also hold onto the reality, dare we even say the doctrine The of the Trinity. Where in the midst of our struggles to be humble, gentle, patient, to bear with each other and love we remind ourselves over and over again, “ There is one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of us all.”