

John 15:12-17 (NRSV)

¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16 (NRSV)

I 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.

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 knit 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.

Jesus not only prays that we would be one, he has chosen us so that we might be unified in purpose, bearing fruit that will last.

Last week, we looked at Jesus’ prayer for unity among his disciples. He prayed that they would not only be one among themselves, but also one with him and one with the Father, just as Jesus is one with the Father. One . . . one . . . one . . .

This week, we begin again with Jesus’ long discourse from John 14-17. It is the eve of his crucifixion and he has much to say to his disciples before he leaves them. Before concluding with the prayer from which we drew last week’s Scripture passage, Jesus speaks of:

1. *The believers relationship to the glorified Christ.* Things are about to change. Jesus is leaving and the disciples’ relationship with him will not be what it was. They won’t walk and talk with him as they had for the last several years. They will have to learn what it means to be with Christ as you and I are with Christ.
2. *The believers’ way of life.* How then are they, and hence we, to live? What is our purpose? To what end have we been chosen by God? It is from this section that we draw today’s first Scripture passage.
3. *The believers’ relationship to the world.* We can’t be the light of the world or the salt of the earth without being in the world. Yet, staying true to Jesus inevitably

Paul’s Plural “You”

We are individualistic people living in an individualistic society. When we come to Paul’s letters it’s natural that we’d read the many “you’s” as being directed at each of us. Thus, we read today’s passage as Paul saying to me that I am to “lead a life worthy of the calling to which [I] have been called.”

But that isn’t really Paul’s point. His “you” in verse 1 is plural, not singular. He is speaking to the community of believers, as a body, not as a bunch of individuals. It is the community’s calling that he is speaking of. If Paul had been a Texan, the passage would read this way: “I beg y’all to lead a life worthy of the calling . . .” For Paul, everything began and ended with the community.

In Paul’s letters, nearly all the “you’s” are plural. Paul’s work is focused on starting and growing communities of believers. Do what builds up the community he writes. Do what is a good witness to others. Avoid what tears down the community. Avoid what is a bad witness to others. Those four instructions pretty well summarize all of Paul’s teachings about what believers should and shouldn’t do. It is about the “us,” not the “me.”

puts us in conflict with the world. But in this, we are not alone. Jesus promises that after he leaves, he will send another, our Comforter and Advocate, God's Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who guides us into all truth (16:13).

"I chose you . . . to bear fruit, fruit that lasts" (John 15:16)

Many Christians find Jesus' lengthy discourse pretty challenging to read. It often seems redundant, wordy, and even abstract. Yet, even as we strive to grasp Jesus' meaning, there are occasions that a verse jumps off the page, as if it is written in neon lights. 15:16 is like that for me.

Rev. Michael Reeves on our unified purpose

"There are as many opinions about what the church should be and do as there are people expressing opinions. While some might observe holiness in a church or spiritual maturity, others with a different point of view might express that the church lacks holiness and maturity. How do we find the right point of view? In Wesleyan theology we embrace the "Quadrilateral" which is the concept that scripture, reason, experience, and tradition help us define reality and discern God's will. This idea of being united can be seen throughout Scripture but is difficult to understand and actually achieve.

In John 15:16 we have that wonderful defining of reality from God's perspective – we didn't choose him, he chose us for a purpose! Then in Ephesians we find Paul giving instruction about unity of the spirit. Verses 4-6 are focused on the oneness required and expected of the faith experience. Then in the later verses 11 – 16, he says that while we are each gifted in a variety of ways, we work together for God's purposes.

As we practice the holy habits of our faith, we are drawn together...and we are chosen...and we are people with a purpose...

We might have different perspectives but God works through us in our diversity to accomplish His purposes. Over the last 22 years, God has worked through St Andrew to transform lives. When we started, few of us could have imagined what we have today. And likewise, few of us can envision that the best is yet to come and we are a part of it. Our future is unlimited.

But what do we do next, what is needed now?

We shared a vision day last October when many of our leaders shared their dreams...and we identified a strategic plan that we feel came from God's continuing revelation for us. And we are about to take the next steps in our purposeful life together.

After being called together in prayer, we want to embrace our unlimited future...

We need to reduce our mortgage.

We need to provide room for growth.

And we need to do it together . . ."

Jesus is quite direct. We didn't choose him, he chose us.¹ And he chose us for a purpose, with an outcome in mind. Namely, that we would bear fruit. This image looks back to the beginning of chapter 15. There, in one of the great "I am" statements in John's gospel, Jesus reveals that he is the true vine and the Father is the vinegrower. The believers are branches in that vine and, Jesus says, the branches which don't bear fruit will be pruned away. The image of the fruit, in turn, looks back to chapter 14 and clearly seems to refer to the works of love that are to characterize Jesus' followers (14:12, 15, 21, 23).

This is not to be like the fruit I always seem to buy, which quickly blackens and rots. Rather, Jesus has chosen us so that we would bear fruit that lasts, that endures. Our works of love, what we *do* out of love for others, are to be lasting, not transitory and superficial.

I take Jesus' meaning to be that he has chosen us, the community of believers, for a purpose. We are to embrace an enduring trust in Jesus Christ, a lasting love of God and neighbor, an unyielding commitment to justice and mercy, and a continuing focus on those who will come after us.

I remember walking around the building with Rev. Leighton Farrell before we moved into the new sanctuary. He told me that the building committee had decided against building the enticingly cheap prefab "warehouse" buildings. The committee wanted to build a sanctuary and a campus that would endure, that would be serving generations stretching into the 22nd century.

We stand not only with the great cloud of believers from the last 2,000 years, we stand with the believers who will come after us. To them, we must pass on a faith, a purpose, and a community given us by God.

"Joined and knit together by every ligament" (Ephesians 4:16)

But such purposes and perspectives stretch us and challenge us to keep the larger and longer view before us. It isn't easy to understand, defend, and pass on the faith that was passed

¹Like Paul, Jesus' "you's" are plural here. He is speaking to "us." See the page one text box.

on to us. It isn't easy teaching our children to serve and to care for others. It isn't easy reaching out to the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. Indeed, all this requires our collective efforts. It takes not only unity, but unity of purpose.

As I explore a bit more in the page three text box, we are a diverse bunch, bound together by God into one body, sharing one baptism and one faith. Paul wants us to understand that God embraces this diversity, as he should, since he is diversity's creator. Indeed, God has compounded this diversity by giving us a variety of gifts to use in bearing lasting fruit. Today's passage from Ephesians has one such list: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. But this is only one list of several in Paul's letters. None of these lists are meant to be complete, all are meant to drive home his point that we may be diverse people given diverse gifts, but we are all one body. Each of us is like a ligament in the body. Different jobs, different tasks, yes. But the Spirit knits us together so that we may bear lasting fruit. It takes us all to, as Paul puts it, promote the body's growth in building itself up in love, namely, the works of love that are Jesus' fruit of the vine.

Thus, it has been especially encouraging to see the St. Andrew family enthusiastically embrace a forward-looking five-year ministry plan and commit to raising the money to both reduce our mortgage burden and to provide new space for growth. We share a vision for our future that was formulated by our Senior Pastor, staff, lay leaders, and many St. Andrew members. Now, we are moving forward in making that vision a reality.

Who or What Makes Us One?

Zyggology. Be honest, you never knew there was such a word. Neither did I until the other day. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *zyggology* is the branch of technology dealing with fastening and joining things together. An expert in rivets or post-it notes would be a *zyggologist*! In today's passage from Ephesians 4, Paul is a spiritual *zyggologist* of sorts.

We at St. Andrew are a congregation within the larger body of Christ. We now have nearly 5,600 members of our congregation. What holds us together? What binds us into the community we've named St. Andrew? Is it our political affiliation? Our race? Marital status? How about our pastor? The warm welcomes we extend to one another on Sunday mornings? Perhaps our doctrine or our sacraments? No, none of those are the glue that holds us together. We are one body, of one faith and one baptism, empowered by one Spirit. Our unity, our oneness, arises from the unity of God. There is one God, one Father, one Lord, one Spirit – who is “above all and through all and in all.” In Christ and Christ alone lies our unity.

We are all very different people, with different backgrounds, given differing talents and skills by God, but we have been called to the unity of the Spirit in the knowledge of Christ. I have been part of many churches and never before have I encountered the strong fellowship and harmony that characterizes St. Andrew. It is important to hear Paul's plea that we preserve our fellowship. That we be patient with one another, humble and gentle, lovingly giving one another the benefit of the doubt. It is our strong connection to one another that Paul describes as the ligaments in the body of Christ. We grow in love when we are well-connected, one to another.

Thus, the recent *unanimous* votes at church conference to proceed with the renovation and expansion programs, as well as the capital campaign to pay for them, were important and significant in the life of St. Andrew. As one body, we decided to press ahead aggressively seeking to bear fruit, to make disciples, to be the people Jesus has called us and chosen us to be.

READING WITH HEART & MIND, APRIL 13 - 19

Monday, John 14 Since we've drawn readings from Jesus' discourse for the last two weeks, it is probably a good idea to read the whole thing. This chapter focuses on the disciples and our own relationship to the risen and ascended, hence glorified, Christ.

Tuesday, John 15 Jesus instructs his disciples on the way of life that they are to follow. It is a life grounded in love, bearing the fruit of that love.

Wednesday, John 16 The Jesus Way inevitably leads to conflicts with the world. If not, we need to ask ourselves how well we truly understand and practice Jesus' way.

Thursday, John 17 Jesus' closing prayer

Friday, 1 Peter 4:1-11 Some thoughts from Peter on what it means to live for God.

Saturday, Romans 12:4-8 The gifts given us are to be used to build up the body.

Sermon Notes

***Get the Monkey Off Your Back:
Making Sense of Creation and Evolution
A New Something Else series on Sundays***

The debate around issues of creation and evolution isn't going away. Instead, it seems to get more and more heated, with a lot more talk than understanding. In this series, we'll try to make sense of the debate and see that Christian truth claims are not at odds with scientific claims.

Taught by Scott Engle at 11:00 in Festival Hall on Sunday morning.
Today: The Bible and Genesis Next week: Understanding evolution

***A Bible Academy Saturday workshop on April 19
How to be a Conservative/Liberal Christian without Losing Your
Faith with Dr. Leroy Howe***

Too often, too much of the energy that the Holy Spirit pours into our lives and into the ministry and mission of the Church gets swallowed up in rancorous disputes about the right and wrong way to interpret the message of the Gospel for our own time. And yet, conscientious Christians do sometimes find themselves in disagreement about matters of faith and life. This course explores ways of pursuing these differences of opinion toward a greater unity of belief while assuring that the dictates of conscience need never be compromised.

Childcare available. Lunch will be provided.

To register go to www.thebibleacademy.com

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Do you agree that we Americans tend to be pretty individualistic people? If so, why is it so hard for us to hear the good news as a community rather than a bunch of individuals? How might reading the NT as a people (the "we"!) change our understanding of what it means to be a Christian? How can we begin truly to read the Bible as a community?
2. We are called to live as the covenant people of God. How might our covenant relationship with God help us to understand our relationships with others? What ought to characterize our covenant relationships with others in the body of Christ? How would these covenant relationships differ from relationships we have with those living outside the covenant?
3. We are to bear lasting fruit, i.e., enduring works of love. What are the works of love that you could point to over the last day, week, or month? In what ways are they enduring? How are you working with others to "promote the body's growth in building itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:16)? How can we help to ensure that St. Andrew's continued growth will produce these enduring works of love?