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Sermon 08 Nov 2020 A Life Worthy

Good morning church! We hope that you've had a good week and that you've been able to or will be able to spend some time at the sites of remembrance. There's a beautiful Remembrance Walk at Douglas Park in Largs and there's one on the grounds of the Cathedral of the Isles in Millport. And of course, St John's Church has their poppies displayed on the building – and it's a beautiful and moving installation.

We're looking at the Epistle to the Ephesians this morning. One of the first things you might notice right at the beginning of the very first chapter, is that Paul doesn't give the kind of detail that he gives in other letters. There's no mention of Timothy, like in Colossians and Philemon. No mention of individual problems within a church or congregation, in fact, in some early manuscripts of Ephesians lack the opening reference to Ephesus entirely. Because of this, many scholars think that unlike letters written specifically to the church of Corinth or Philemon, Ephesians was a circular letter – a letter that circulated from one church to another.

One of the things to remember here is that the production of any letter was a very expensive thing. The manuscripts were expensive, to use a scribe to write the letter would have been expensive, even making copies would have been expensive. They didn't have Microsoft word and the ability to print or make pdfs and email them out.

So writing one letter and passing it around from house church to house church and maybe from city to city would have easier than making copies of it. In addition, many people couldn't read, so the letters would be read aloud to the church congregation which also gave the reader the opportunity to plug

in the church name or the names of church leaders or influencers so having a lack of personal details gave flexibility and longevity to the letter.

Theologians & scholars say that the Epistle to the Ephesians established a vision of the church and its mission and as a whole, the book can be broken down into two parts – in the first half, Paul explores the Gospel story and how all of creation comes together in Jesus through the creation of this beautifully diverse community of followers from different places and different backgrounds, different religious groups – a brand new, unified humanity that lives in peace (2:15).

The first half of the epistle is filled with beautiful imagery and poetry of the gospel story and that now, through Jesus, anyone can be adopted into the family – Jews, Gentiles, Circumcised, UnCircumcised, the clean and the unclean. Jesus death covers all of our sins and in Christ we find God's immeasurable Grace. And Paul didn't want them to miss that part – the part where God said – I choose YOU –by grace you've been saved through faith – not of your own doing – but a Gift from God, through Christ Jesus. And Paul tells us that the church is God's art, God's poetry, the church is a reflection of Christ to the world.

So the first half focuses on hearing and accepting the Gospel story, while the second half focuses on the doing part - how the Gospel story should affect how we live our Life story.

That brings us to our scripture this morning. Open your Bible to Ephesians chapter 4. Beginning with verse 1 -- I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

And let's look at verse 17

<sup>17</sup> Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. <sup>19</sup> They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. <sup>20</sup> That is not the way you learned Christ! <sup>21</sup> For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, <sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

<sup>25</sup> So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and do not make room for the devil. <sup>28</sup> Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. <sup>29</sup> Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up,<sup>[b]</sup> as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, <sup>32</sup> and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.<sup>[c]</sup>

This is the word of God for the people of God.

Precious heavenly Father, Thank you, for the work of your son Jesus in our lives. Open our ears to hear your voice speak clearly this morning as we spend some time in your word. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

In Chapter 4, Paul is making it crystal clear to his hearers (and that includes us) that we have a call to be different from the world – different from our old ways of living. That we should think differently,

feel differently, live differently than the world. That we should live a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

This morning I'd like for us to look at three things that Paul suggests we need to guard – three things that are to be protected as we grow in our daily walk with Christ.

In verse 17, Paul tells us “you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds, darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance” let's stop right there. The greek that is used here for understanding is *dianoia*. And as we've heard in other sermons, *dianoia* is not just thinking in general, it's a kind of thinking – critical thinking – thinking that weighs both sides of an issue. It's the same word used in Matthew Chapter 22 where Jesus says “You shall love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” The mind is a powerful organ. And it seems, especially in our online communities, that people seem to be forgetting how to think – believing whatever information they've seen posted on the internet as truth and then forwarding it on, without questioning for themselves, so much so that online companies like Facebook and Twitter now have algorithms written into their programming to fact check and red-flag untrue or unfounded things being posted online. Our minds naturally have those algorithms pre-programmed by an amazing God and we're meant to use our brains to critically think about things, protecting our minds against things like ignorance and futility. This doesn't just apply to online – it also applies to things we read, shows we watch on TV, the news outlets we pay attention to. As Christians called to live a different life, called to live like Christ, we absolutely must protect our minds from the corruption and the manipulation of truth. We've got to critically examine information and make an intentional choice to accept or reject the things we believe. Else ware Paul tells us that we are to have in us the same mind as Christ so that we can discern. We are called to have discernment. Renewed in the spirit of our minds.

So the first thing we need to protect, to guard is our mind.

The second thing we need to guard as we grow in our daily walk with Christ is our heart. In the verses we just looked at, Paul says, “you must no longer live as the gentiles live” - and what Paul is saying here is you must not live the way you used to live - no longer as they lived, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. When I began to study this passage, my mind instantly thought about how God hardened Pharaoh’s heart in the Exodus story but it’s not the same meaning there. In Exodus, the Hebrew word Chazaq means to grow firm or to strengthen – a strong or you could even say a stubborn heart. So in Exodus, Pharaoh’s heart grew more fixed on his own way of thinking and rigidly convinced that it was his way or no way and he wasn’t listening to arguments otherwise.

But the word for a hardened heart here doesn’t mean that at all. The word used here, porosis, hardening, is only used in two other places in the New Testament and one of those places is in Mark 3:5 when Jesus was in the temple with the man with a crippled hand and the Pharisees were carefully watching him to see if he’d heal on the Sabbath. Jesus was grieved at the hardness of their hearts. In this case as in our scripture this morning, the authors are using a word that means calloused, blind, like marble – Jesus was grieved at the callousness, the blindness, the hardness of the Pharisees hearts. And here, Paul tells us that we should no longer live as we did where our calloused, our blind hearts caused us to be alienated from the life of God. We must guard against a calloused heart – a heart that’s blind to the pain in the world, calloused to the pain that we’re causing our brothers and sisters.

Later in verses 31 and 32, Paul contrasts a hard heart with a tender heart. “Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven”. Tenderhearted, merciful, compassionate, a literal translation for that word tenderhearted, eusplagchnos, in the greek, is “living with guts”. I love that! And guts here doesn’t mean being a daredevil or acting in a foolhardy way. It means to listen to that gut feeling! And you know what I’m talking about. Some call it instinct

or intuition or conscience – or discernment. But to “live with guts” you have to be sensitive. And that brings us to the third thing we must protect, the third thing we must guard as we grow in our walk with Christ.

Paul tells us in verse 19 that those you must no longer live like have “lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. “ These are people who treat each other like objects, who have no empathy, who see others only as a means to satisfy their desires. Paul uses one single greek word that is translated “having lost all sensitivity” and that word that describes such a condition is *apalgeó* and that word is not as unfamiliar as it might sound. The first part of the word “apa” just means “the absence of”, like apathy means the absence of emotion and the second part of the word “algeo” means pain, as in analgesic – a drug that you take for pain or neuralgia, nerve pain or nostalgia, the pain that you feel when you’re longing for the past. And so, when Paul says that these Gentiles have lost all sensitivity, he uses a word that means they don’t feel pain.

There’s a rare disorder called CIP – Congenital Insensitivity to Pain and people with CIP don’t feel pain – at all. They can stick their hand in a pot of boiling water and feel nothing. Now this seems like a super power, but if you think about it, pain is incredibly important to the process of learning how not to do damage to our bodies. And sadly, many people with CIP have killed themselves by their late 20’s by doing dangerous things like jumping off of rooftops or participating in extreme sports because they weren’t sensitive to pain and didn’t understand the warning sign that pain communicates to us. When a person is insensitive to pain, they can do a lot of damage to the body.

Being sensitive to pain - emotional pain, physical pain, spiritual pain, both our own pain and the pain of others is part of being human and certainly part of being the new humans that we are in Christ, each of us members of the body of Christ that Paul so often refers to. As Christ followers we are called to show grace to others, just as we have been shown grace. And when we lose our sensitivity,

our thoughtfulness, our empathy to others, particularly those who are members with us of the body of Christ, we run the risk of damaging the body and hindering its ability to function. We must not lose our sensitivity.

So we have seen that Paul is reminding us that to live like Christ, created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness, we have to live differently. Paul tells us that when the world lives in futility and darkened understanding, we must guard our minds, speaking truth to our neighbours. When the world embraces ignorance and hardness of heart, we must be kind, tenderhearted and “live with guts”. And when the world treats one another like objects, lacks empathy, and sees others only as a means to satisfy desires, we must be sensitive to others, show kindness, forgiveness and grace.

In a world that seems so broken, we are called to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and in doing so, we set an example – we exemplify to a broken world a life that can be lived in wholeness, in peace and joy and unity – a life that renews and redeems, a life that is different – a life that is grounded in truth.

As Paul reminds us in verse 25, “So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.” let’s live an honest life, a life grounded in truth, a life that doesn’t damage the body of believers but builds it up – strengthens it so that it can be sacrificed for the sake of others. Paul puts all of this together in Chapter 5 when he tells us “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, <sup>2</sup> and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

It’s a challenge that Paul gave to the early church and one that still resounds in our ears today. Let’s rise to that challenge, church.

Have a wonderful Sunday – you are loved.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.