

Practicing Resurrection...Want to Grow Up?
Ephesians 4:1-16
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Michael Carey

In his biography, Brother to a Dragonfly, Will Campbell tells a story about a fellow Baptist minister, Thad Garner. Neither of them were models of piety, in part because both were angry about how many pious Christians were full of racial prejudice in 1950s Mississippi. So the two angry pastors drank and cussed when they got together; not especially inspiring behavior from “men of the cloth.”

One day they went quail hunting. After hours of chasing the dogs and scouring the fields for a covey, they saw the thrilling sight of the dogs frozen on point; indicating that the briar patch held quail. The men crept up, hearts beating fast, ready for winter stillness to erupt in an explosion of wings and a volley of gunshots. But before they were ready, one of the dogs broke point and the birds flew up. Thad fired desperately but not a bird was taken. And according to Will, Thad erupted in the most intense volley of cussing he’d ever heard. He cursed the dogs, the birds, even his friend. Finally, he collapsed along a side of a hill.

Will couldn’t help but ask, “Thad, why *did* you become of Baptist preacher?” Thad, looking a little hurt, didn’t hesitate, “Because I was called, you [blanket-blank] fool!”

Though spoken by a deeply troubled man, it’s not a bad answer. As we read Ephesians 4, we’ll re-discover **our calling as church**. The original Greek word for church, **ekklesia**, meant “those called together.” Despite our personal sins and hateful attitudes, we *can* live up to this calling!

¹As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Chapter 3 ended with Paul’s exuberant praise of God’s sovereign redemption; now he shifts into the practical application of what it means to practice resurrection. Having become the bondservant of the Lord, Paul has the authority to challenge the church to *live worthy lives*. The word “live” is the English translation of “**peripateo**, to walk.” Disciples were taught to follow after their teachers, to “walk in their way.” Those who walk in the way of Jesus are his **ekklesia**; his “called out ones.” And to make this point Paul deliberately makes repeated use of the same root word for “call”—**kaleo**. It helps to look at your note page. *I—**parakaleo**—urge you/call upon, to live a life worthy of the calling—**klaseos**—to which you have been—**eklate**—called.* Though he doesn’t use the word here, he’s speaking to the—**ekklesia**—the called out ones, the church. Isn’t that cool! “Called out ones, I call upon you to walk in the way worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”

So Thad Garner was onto something, even though he and his church members weren’t yet living a life worthy of their calling in Christ. And as Paul gets specific, we see how far we have to go...*be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with each other in love...making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* And then, probably quoting an early church praise chorus, Paul declares *for there is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to*

one hope when you were called—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The Christian life is about getting better together, though such harmony with God and each other takes time. Eugene Peterson tells of a time when he and his wife were walking through a city park when a man jumped off his bicycle and asked, “How long have you been married?” Startled by such an out-of-the-blue question, they managed a puzzled but courteous, “thirty-three years.”

“I knew it,” he said. “Do you realize that you walk in perfect step with one another? I mean absolutely synchronized perfect.’ My wife and I have been married five years and we haven’t got it down yet. We are just always micro-seconds off.” That was it. He was back on his bicycle and on his way.

Peterson then added:

We resumed our walk, pleased with ourselves that across thirty-three years of marriage we had mastered this miracle of walking together in perfect rhythm...But the moment we became self-conscious about it, we couldn’t do it...We did observe that “walking in perfect step” doesn’t come from setting that as a marital goal and disciplining ourselves to an hour of practice each day. (Practice Resurrection, p. 179)

Friends, many of you are beginning to experience the miracle of walking in rhythm with Jesus Christ; not perfect rhythm...but God’s new life within you and your commitment to walk with him, along with the saints, has slowly transformed you. And many of you who frequently find yourselves out-of-rhythm with Jesus can relax, you are being transformed.

We are all on a journey, a **quest**, as **God’s people**, as we strive for worthiness. We make the journey together because we need each other; our Lord Jesus has enriched us with gifts of grace we are to share with each other: (v. 7)

⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is why it says: [in Psalm 68] “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” ⁹(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Paul understood Psalm 68 as a metaphor of how Jesus descended to earth to do battle with evil, and as a conquering warrior distributes the plunder to his soldiers, the ascended, resurrected Jesus throws spiritual gifts to his legions. And we know that on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon every Christ-follower, filling each disciple with power. And since Pentecost, each Christian who receives Jesus receives his Holy Spirit. We each receive the Spirit’s guidance, we each receive the fruit of the Spirit’s work, and we each receive distinct spiritual gifts that bless the church. Look at verse 11 again: *it was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.* These are gifts of leadership; they don’t exhaust the list of

spiritual gifts—in his letter to the Corinthians Paul lists “quieter” spiritual gifts such as wisdom and faith.

The leadership gifts that produce apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers exist for one reason: *to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.* The root word for service is *diakonias*, from where we get the word “deacon;” here it means “ministry.” The Bible teaches that every disciple has a ministry and shares the church’s ministry. You are no less of a minister than I am. The Presbyterian denomination declares me an ordained minister of the Word and Sacrament. But my leadership role is to prepare all of you for deeds of ministry. More than ever, I ask myself, “Is what I’m doing equipping the saints for ministry?” I desire that the sermons I preach, the classes I teach, the leaders I train, the phone calls I make, and the emails I send, empower hundreds of disciples for ministry. When we look back on the way we adapted the purpose-driven church model here at Trinity, we marvel at the way that hundreds of ministers are now blessing thousands of lives...and we dream of thousands of ministers blessings tens of thousands! What a great opportunity you have on August 8, if you arrange to be on campus an additional hour in order to invest in the Discovering Your Ministry Seminar!

Verse 13 shows us where **our quest as God’s people takes us.** Leaders equip us for ministry, the Spirit uses our individual ministries to build up the body of Christ, *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* The goal of our transformation is *unity in the faith...the knowledge of the Son of God...and in a word...maturity...that’s’ the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* In resurrection we shall be perfect—no flaw. In this life, we are to practice resurrection; while not perfect, you and I become mature—spiritual grown-ups.

So Paul wraps up this section by casting a vision of what it means to be a spiritual grown up. He wants us to see **our potential as members of Christ’s body.** Let’s read verses 14-16 together:

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Before us are two radically contrasting images. The first is a dreadful image of little babies drowning in the raging surf. Living near the coast, we know how dangerous riptides are for adults, and cringe to think of a small child caught in the waves. Yet many people who dabble in spirituality as like *infants; they are tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every wind of teaching.* As a pastor I see such tragedy, the spiritually immature Christians tricked *by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.* I see militant atheists tricking young people into doubting that God exists. I see people flock to the self-help section of the bookstore to purchase The Secret, which is sheer new age philosophy. I see people devouring pagan spirituality books like Echarad Tolle’s A New Earth because Oprah recommends them. I hear people rave about “health and wealth” TV preachers. Every now and then I meet libertarians who read Ayn Rand’s Atlas Shrugged, which puts the survival of the fittest as the greatest value and concludes that Christianity is a religion for losers. *Deceitful scheming* can come from across ideological spectrum.

I don't worry about mature Christians been exposed to such junk. I can read these things and not drown, because the Spirit has used the church and God's word to grow me up. The more I grow, the more I want to grow—truly mature people never stop growing, and they can learn from anyone.

What about you? Have you been **born from above**; have you welcomed spiritual re-birth? If not, tell me or someone else; and we will share with you how you can receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

If you have been born again, are you still an **infant**? Are you still a “babe in Christ, dependent on the church's milk, or are you now eating solid food?

Have you grown into a **spiritual adolescent**? Do you go from a teenager's excitement to questioning your faith? Adolescents go up and down; I sense that many of you are adolescents.

Or perhaps spiritually, you're a **young adult**. You are past the ups and downs; your faith is growing, you are connected with spiritual friendships, though your energy is mainly concerned with your own growth. That is where I think many people are.

The next stage is **spiritual parent**; that's when you can help someone else receive new birth in Christ, and when you can disciple them as a mother nurses a child, then weans the child. That's when you can teach and equip other disciples. I really want the rest of my teaching ministry to help you grow to become parents.

Some among us become **wise sages** in the faith—you embody *the fullness of Christ*, as much as it's possible in this life. I'm not there yet; the lessons God is teaching me now about relationships are maturing me into that stage.

There is great hope for me, and for you to reach your potential, if we continue to participate as members of Christ's body. Instead of remaining infants, *speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

What a beautiful image! Maturing people who can *speak the truth in love, growing up into Christ, the Head of the church body, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, naturally grows up, naturally builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

We called out ones have incredible potential; if we stay together and fully participate in this quest, growth just happens. More than we know, we will walk in ways worthy of the calling to which we've been called.