

9.18.2016 Trinity 17 (Ephesians 4:1-6)

There was once a water carrier in India whose job it was to bring water from the river to his master's house. Day after day, he would take two pots on a long pole down to the river, fill them up, and bring them back. One fateful day, the water carrier stumbled and fell. When he fell, one of his water pots cracked. The next day the water carrier resumed his vocation, going down to the water, filling up his two pots and going back to his master's house. The difference now was that the cracked pot only made it back to the house with half of the water that it had been filled with at the river.

One morning, before the water carrier went down to the river, the water pot spoke to the water carrier. It said, "I'm ashamed of myself." The water carrier asked why and the pot explained that it had felt bad ever since they day that they had fallen, because after that day the water pot had only been able to bring back half as much water. The water pot said, "I want to go back to the day when I could bring back a full pot of water, and since I can't go back to that day, I ask that you break me on a rock and throw me on the trash pile." The water carrier, seeing that the pot was in such distress said, "Let's try this, today I won't fill you up with any water. Today, all I want you to do is to enjoy the ride to the river and back and watch for the flowers along the way." At the end of that day the water pot again spoke to the water carrier and said the same thing, "I feel ashamed of myself. I'm broken. Just throw me on the trash pile." The water carrier asked the pot, "Did you notice the flowers along the way?" The water pot said, "Of course I noticed the flowers, but that has nothing to do with me." "Ah," said the water carrier, "but it does." "You see, the day after I had fallen I noticed that I was leaving a trail of water behind me. That day I took some wildflower seeds and I spread them along that side of the path. You have watered those seeds, which now have become flowers that I pick every day when I am coming back. Now I not only grace my master's table with water, but with beautiful flowers as well."

Consider these words from our Epistle this morning, "I THEREFORE, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1). Like a water carrier, like a water pot, we have all been made for and called to a particular vocation. Vocations come in all shapes and sizes, but the one vocation all Christian's have in common is described in the letter to the Galatians. There we read (3:26-28), "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond

nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” The vocation that is common to every Christian is to be a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus and in our Epistle St. Paul beseeches us to walk worthy of this calling. He tells us to live out what we believe, what we confess, what the Word of God declares we are: “The children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

When we consider our experience in this world it’s easy to recognize the fact that people live out what they believe. What you believe defines you and serves as the foundation for how you view the world, life, other people, and yourself. If you believe that life is all about pleasure, you will eat, drink, and be merry. If you believe that life is all about a big bank account, you will spend day and night hard at work. If, however, you believe that at your baptism you “put on Christ;” you will live like a child of God.

Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is a gift and a calling. When St. Paul says, “Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,” he is exhorting Christians to deliberately and consciously live as a member of the Church, a member of the body of Christ, living out our faith in unity with one another and with all those who are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. The tough question is, how can we possibly do that? How do we walk worthy of such a miraculous vocation? Paul describes the steps of this “worthy walk” in this way: “...with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-3).

So, the first element in the “worthy walk” is lowliness, humility. For the Christian to walk in humility makes perfect sense, because we are called to this vocation only by the grace of God. We did nothing to deserve such a calling. It was Almighty God that chose to bless us and save us through the blood of His only Son. We do not merit such a priceless gift, so we have no reason to take pride in our status as His children. We did not choose Him, He chose us before the foundation of the world for reasons we cannot begin to fathom (John 15:16, Ephesians 1:4). To be called a child of God is a gift that only the Father can give. There is no room for pride in a vocation we could never earn.

The “worthy walk” also includes meekness. To be meek is to be like Christ. Meekness is not weakness, but strength under control. Consider our Lord’s perfect example: The Son of God was arrested, beaten, scourged, spit on, and nailed to the Cross. When the people passed by as God hung on the Cross they mocked Him saying, “If thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross”

(Matthew 27:40). Jesus had calmed the sea, fed the multitudes, walked on water, and raised the dead. From the Cross He could have called legions of angels to destroy these people, but He didn't. He "committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth ... when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:22,23). Instead of destroying those who sought to destroy Him, He prayed for them from the Cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is strength under control.

Paul goes on to tell us the "worthy walk" is accomplished through "long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." These words speak of patience and forgiveness, which go hand in hand with humility and meekness. In everything our Lord endured on this earth He exhibited a perfect example of patient forgiveness. As we read through the Bible time and again we see examples where His disciples just don't get it. How often did Jesus speak of his suffering, death, and resurrection; yet these events hit His closest followers as a complete surprise. They constantly forgot what they should have remembered, didn't learn from what they had seen and experienced, and had to be taught the same lessons over and over again; but He never gives up on them – or us. So we, as children of God who have been so patiently forgiven, are now called to patiently forgive. We walk worthy of our vocation by representing and imitating Christ on earth as members of God's family, as those who share His same purpose, "that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17).

Finally, Paul says that in this "worthy walk" we must endeavor to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This means living out the reality of the unity we have been given in Jesus Christ in the midst of a world that tempts us into conflict and division. When we pray for the Unity of God's people we rightly declare there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all - "who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:6). We are reminded that though we are individuals, we are all members of one body, the Church of which Jesus Christ is the head. We are called to be in His Church where through Word and Sacrament by faith we are united as children to God our Father.

These inspired words from God given to St. Paul order our steps in this "worthy walk." We live in a day in which this isn't easy. I would suggest there was a moment in the history of the world when this "worthy walk" was easier than it is

today. Imagine a time when “the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed” (Genesis 2:8). It’s a beautiful image, but we all know how the story goes. Like the water carrier, our first parents stumbled, fell, and now “the whole creation groans and travails in pain...” (Romans 8:22). If your life has been anything like mine there have been moments when you’ve felt as unworthy as that cracked water pot. Moments when you’ve thought, perhaps even said to aloud to God: I’m broken. I’m unworthy. I’m unable. Throw me on that trash pile.

In those moments it’s imperative to remember the “vocation wherewith ye are called.” “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” We are not water carriers heading down to the river to earn our day’s wages, to earn a place in our master’s house. Not one of us could ever work hard enough to earn such a position. We are the children of God and in the context of this sermon we are water pots formed by our Master, knit together in our mother’s womb by our Creator. St. Paul tells us that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works...” (Ephesians 2:10). Our failures may discourage us. We may feel broken, ashamed, unable to serve, like we belong on a trash pile, but if we open the Bible we will see that many cracked water pots have done miraculous things for the kingdom of God.

The great heroes of our faith are described in the Bible as very imperfect people. After being used by God to save the human race, Noah got drunk and embarrassed his family. Abraham lied about his wife and agreed to have children with her servant. David committed adultery and murder. Peter denied Jesus three times. Paul tells us he is the chief of all sinners. These examples are in the Bible for our benefit. The Bible records these events that show God finds great joy in salvaging our broken lives and there is no greater proof of that fact than Christ Jesus coming into this world to save sinners. If your imperfections have left you feeling broken, ashamed, unable to serve - open your Bible and take a ride down to the river. Along the way be sure to look at the trail of wildflowers leading to the kingdom of God that have been watered by cracked and broken water pots.