

10.4.2020 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, and one of his water pots cracked. The next day the water carrier resumed his vocation, going down to the river, filling up his two pots and going back to his master's house. The difference now was that the cracked water 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 spoke again 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 what difference does that make?" "A big difference," said the water carrier. "You see, the day after I fell, 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 Christians have in common is described in the letter to the Galatians (3:26-28). There we read, *“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 urges 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 St. Paul writes, *“Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,”* he’s exhorting Christians to deliberately and consciously live as a member of the body of Christ, living out our faith in union with every child of God, by faith in Christ Jesus, but the difficult question is, how do we walk worthy of such a miraculous calling? This is a question that Paul answers by describing the steps of the *“worthy walk.”* He tells Christians to walk *“...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, in Paul’s description we see the first step in the *“worthy walk”* is humility. As Jesus expressed in our Gospel reading today, we don’t seek the best seat at the table, because we know that we are called to this vocation only by the grace of God. We couldn’t earn it, we don’t deserve it, and so we have no reason to take pride in our miraculous status as children of God. Remember, we didn’t choose God, God chose us before the foundation of the world for reasons we cannot even begin to fathom (John 15:16, Ephesians 1:4).

Paul goes on to tell us that 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. As we read the Gospels, we see Jesus exhibiting a perfect example of patience and forbearance with His disciples. Just consider how often He spoke of His passion, 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, and He never gives up on 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 are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28), not to condemn, but to love and forgive as we have been loved and forgiven.

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 is filled with 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 by faith, through Word and Sacrament, 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,*" but if your life has been anything like mine there have been too many moments that 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. In those moments we must remember the vocation to which God has called us: We are "*the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*" We aren't water carriers heading down to the river to earn a

day's wage, to work for a place in our master's house. Not one of us could ever do enough to earn such a position. We are the children of God, and as children our vocation is not to do more for Him, but to be more with Him. Our failures may discourage us. We may feel broken and unable to serve, but feelings aren't facts, and the truth is, many cracked water pots have done miraculous things for the kingdom of God.

The heroes of our faith are all described as 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 our Lord, "*who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross*" (Hebrews 12:2), for our redemption. So, if imperfections have left you feeling broken, unworthy, or unable to serve, open your Bible and take a ride down to the river, and 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.