



Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

“Walking Together” – Ephesians 4:1-16

11th Sunday after Pentecost – August 5, 2018

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Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Epistle appointed for the day and already read for us from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians in the fourth chapter.

My dear family in Christ, there are any number of phrases that caught me by surprise when I first heard them as a vicar in San Antonio, Texas. It was good to learn them then, because in another year I would be back in Texas – Tomball, to be specific – where I would enter into my first call.

One of the first I'd heard was “**Fixin' to**”. It signals intent by meaning “planning on” or “planning to.” “**You fixin' to eat that pickle?**” “Yes, sir, I am”. Another was “**Might could**”. It means that it's a possibility. “Could you take me to the Walmart?” “**Yes, I might could do that.**” Then there is the ubiquitous southern expression of the second person plural pronoun, “**Ya'll.**” If you want to get really expansive you can refer to “all Ya'll.” And then there is the second person plural possessive which is pronounced “**Ya'll's**”. “Ya'll can get out ya'll's offering here in a minute”.

The one that took some thinking to understand was the question, “**Are you bein' ugly?**” “Bein' ugly” is translated as being rude, being obnoxious, or being mean.

St. Paul could be translated into a Texas dialect, with respect to the Ephesians text before us, by the phrase “**Don’t be ugly, now.**” Those on the receiving end of this letter had been ugly. Later in this same chapter St. Paul remarks on how in Jesus they had **“to put off (their) old self, which belongs to (their) former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,”** (v 22). And then there is the encouragement so that they will not go back to that way of life in the future “**...do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil... ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.**” Again, don’t be ugly, now.

They, and we, are encouraged to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we have received. That’s the call to all who have come to faith in the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. You and Jami, Mary, Chase, and I have been walking that road together these last 15 years. And even next week, when I am installed as pastor 491 miles away from here, we will still be walking together. That is true not only of the LCMS – where Synod comes from *syn* – “with or together”, and *hodos* – “road” = walking the same road – but it’s true with the entire body of Christ.

We walk together in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace. Regardless of time and space, we have been brought together in the one body of Christ. We have received the one Holy Spirit calling us to redemption. We have spent our lives making that one confession: that Jesus Christ is Lord, the crucified one Who in His resurrection has defeated sin, death and everlasting condemnation for us all.

That has happened for us and it continues to happen in and among us. St. Paul reminds us of how this has taken place and how it can continue to be the case for the days to come.

This happens, time after time, through the gifts given to us. God has given to us the apostles, prophets and evangelists whose words we read and sing and take to heart. God has given us pastors and all those who assist in that pastoral office among us – teachers, deaconesses, deacons and the like.

And then there is that gift that you have shared with me and with one another for the past 15 years. It's what is called the “**Mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren**” in our confessions. What that amounts to is the ministry we provide for one another, day in and day out. When you shed a sympathizing tear with that friend whose cancer diagnosis has shaken the neighborhood; when you bow your head to pray over your meal in the café; when you hold a friend or family member accountable for their words or their behavior, knowing they can do so much better; when you speak to the precious nature of life and share how God has valued us all to the point of sending His Son to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world you provide for the building up of the body of Christ.

That building up of the body of Christ, as St. Paul puts it, can be growth in numbers or growth in strength of faith. There is no reason it cannot be both! So powerful is God's word – it makes alive what once was dead. Through the Holy Spirit's ministry it brings peace in the midst of turmoil and heartache. It takes avowed enemies and refashions them as brothers and sister for time and for eternity.

It's important to understand the great blessing of this word, for there are any number of things bent on thwarting us in our lives in Christ Jesus. St. Paul mentions being tossed about by the waves. These could be thought of as the ups and downs of life; the regular frustrations and alienations common to life in a sin infected world. (stanza 2 and 3 of 716). **“I pass through trials all the way, with sin and ills contending; in patience I must bear each day the cross of God's own sending. When in adversity I know not where to flee, when storms of woe my soul**

dismay, I pass through trials all the way. And death pursues me all the way, nowhere I rest securely; he comes by night, he comes by day, he takes his prey most surely. A failing breath, and I in death's strong grasp may lie to face eternity today as death pursues me all the way."

That with which we also contend is the wind that would push us off course, the crafty, deceitful schemes of which are described in the first verse of that hymn (1, 716). **"I walk in danger all the way, the thought shall never leave me that Satan, who has marked his prey, is plotting to deceive me. This foe with hidden snares may seize me unawares if I should fail to watch and pray. I walk in danger all the way"**. It could be that websearch you went on, yet once again. It could be the constant push of materialism touting itself as the true source of happiness and meaning. It could be that controlled substance that continues to seduce you into taking one more trip away from reality. It could be the constant drumbeat of politics, arguing that one's salvation should be sought in the halls of the government.

In this place, not for 15 years but for 147 years, we have dealt with that as St. Paul has coached, by **"speaking the truth in love."** That truth is the revelation of this Creator Who dared to plan to redeem His fallen and rebellious creation. That plan involved the sacrifice of Christ Jesus, His Son, for forgiveness. That plan includes the Holy Spirit's leadership in calling us to repent of our sins, to receive that gift of salvation and to lead lives of discipleship and obedience in thankfulness and praise.

We are to do this always out of love. Speaking the truth in love – not being ugly in this, but loving. I'm fond of reciting a line from The Music Man in pre-marital guidance. It speaks to marriage and to life together in the family of God. Marion, the librarian, is asked by her mother, the widow Peru, why is no man good enough for her. Marion responds, in effect, **"I want a man who is more interested in me than he is in himself. But I want a man who is more interest in us**

than he is in me.” The union is the most important thing, prompting honest always with the goal of reconciliation.

When you and I speak the truth in love, maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, walking in a manner worthy of our calling, we are doing so for the benefit of this union, the Body of Christ. We are concerned enough for the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters that we don't want them wandering away from God's love. We want to warn them of the dangers they are entertaining, always with the desire that they be reconciled to God and that we can be reconciled to one another.

And that reconciliation is a certainty. God has made it so in the passion, death and resurrection, for our forgiveness and life. That is yours, by His grace, now and forever. I cannot think of better words to leave with you. Amen.