

A Time of Refreshing | The Bond of Peace

Ephesians 4:1-6

Text — Ephesians 4:1-6 (ESV)

[1] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Introduction

- Alvin Anderson passing [**Photo of Alvin**]
- Many of us have Alvin’s virtues, but no one touched as many people as he did.
- Acts 8:1-3: “And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. [2] **Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.** [3] But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”

Antoine Green shares

Words about Alvin

- Quote: "Like the sacramental use of water and bread and wine, friendship takes what's common in human experience and turns it into something holy." - Eugene Peterson
- Alvin was sweet and kind, he was affectionate; he encouraged us; he protected and cared for us. And we all loved him.
- But as I prepared for this message today, I couldn't resist what I increasingly feel has been the Spirit's impulse to do something out of the ordinary — eulogize our dear brother and simultaneously encourage our church. Alvin's presence among us has been prophetic. Despite him being an ordinary brother with his own flaws, he brought out something in our church that is beautiful and that I want more of.

Alvin's Gifts to Us

- Alvin's passing has shown us signs of a **Healthy Church**:
 - Across our congregation, people are grieving. 1 Corinthians 12:26: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."
 - Many of you showed up yesterday and beautifully served the family and Renewal. Becky said the halls were teeming with people serving.
 - One of my deepest longings is that you all would be so rooted in our church that when you experience a crisis or a tragedy, people feel your grief with you. And when you experience triumph, people viscerally feel your joy. But in order to cultivate this kind of church, we have to all give of ourselves. The moment we seek these services is the moment this vision dies.
- **Hospitality**:
 - Alvin had a childlike love of friendship that is missing in our cynical world today. He had a way of not only welcoming you into his space, but invading

yours. And it was okay. He called. He texted. He stopped by. He pushed his way into many of our lives.

- He had a gift at being able to gently blunder into our lives and make himself home there. Because of this, I knew I was safe with Alvin.
- And it's **only when we feel safe** with one another that we can really get below the surface and face real issues together. (Notice I didn't say, "deal with issues." No, if we're genuinely going to "deal with issues," it will be all of us, hand-in-hand, facing issues together. That's what **peacemakers** do.)
- Recent launch of our **Justice Think Tank**
 - Idea was to discern how our church's gifts can **intersect with Memphis' pain**. What we don't want is to coordinate one-off events that look really good on our website or FB, and may seem noble, but only put a bandaid on the cancer that is below the surface.
 - This led to some tense conversation. Some hard to hear... **[ROPE PHOTO]**
 - **2016 was discouraging**. People's interaction via politics and racial tension was, at times, as subversively ugly in this church as it was outside of this church: Mean-spirited ridiculing of presidential candidates, the shaming of people who don't view the world through the same lens we do, and the almost complete blow-off of my calls to incarnate ourselves in the lives of people unlike us in order to understand were all deeply distressing.
 - We suffered some **attrition** over this — to some we didn't do enough; to others we were over the top.
- But through these conversations **it occurred to me** that the very reason for our existence was right in front of me.
- We are as uniquely poised as any church to be the kind of community in our city in which we intentionally come together to learn to love each other well. It dawned on me that the very tension that divided us — sometimes tearing us

apart — was our **doorway into the school of love**. Think about it. How do we learn to love? How do we learn to be the kind of people that God intends to raise up? The kind of church that emerges in which these words define us:

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

- **The thing that I despised the most**, the thing that brought much turmoil and fear and loathing into my life and our church is our reason for existing in Memphis, TN. The God-ordained opportunity to learn to love deeply, tenderly, civilly, in the Gospel. To understand in the gospel. To be the kind of church that is rare in this city — one in which the old, crusty memories of the past no longer divide us, but the hope of the New Creation shapes our friendships. To be the kind of church that isn't “gospel” because we think theologically, but gospel because we love theologically. Where we become authentic Jesus-imitating people.

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- The only way we will navigate the storms of that our culture will bring to our church is through friendship. Period. Ranting and shaming won't lead to healing. But love will.

- **Discipleship:**

- One of the most frustrating aspects of church ministry is the powerlessness I have over people. If I could only put my “want-to” inside of them. But, alas, if I were able to do that, I wouldn't be remaking people in Jesus’ image, but my own.
- Our vision for you is that all of you sincerely engage our church's rhythms of discipleship. Less classroom and more culture. Committed Sunday morning participation (not just attendance). Accept my challenge to merge your church life with your devotional life. Dive into a Community Group where you can be known and where you can know others, weaving your life with the lives of others Jesus-people. [TREES PHOTO]
- Alvin did this. With no pretensions, our hired security guard found our church’s message and community so compelling that he moved his membership here and he found new life in Christ that he had never before known.
- I don’t say this to pat ourselves on the back, but because so many of us are still resisting the call to dive in. And if you would just take the plunge, beautiful things would happen in your life! I’m sure of it!

- **Navigating Growth and Intimacy (Multiple Services)**

- A few of you have expressed some concern over our push to go to two services.
- Reasons:
 - Even on our low Sunday’s here, our nurseries are packed;
 - We are always over 80% capacity (chairs and parking places)
 - We need multiple services to be a part of our DNA (growth strategy)
 - Yes, you may not see some people — and that is definitely worthy of sadness. But the goal isn't that every single one of you is tethered to every single

person. The goal is that we are intimately connected to this church. That can be with several families or more.

- There is no scenario that is perfect.
- **Allow me to paint a picture for you...**
- We need you to serve. We need you to really own this church. Alvin used to always say, "This is my church, too." He was reminding us that he wasn't a hireling. He loved Renewal. And he gave himself to Renewal.
 - We need you to serve.
 - We need you to give financially.
 - We need you to be a part of the solution.