

Sermon: Why Presbyterian?
Ephesians 4:1-7,11-16

Daren Hofmann
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Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to **lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. **But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.**

Sermon

The church is not perfect. That is to say, there is no perfect church institution or denomination. That is true of presbyterians and that is true of every other church out there. And this has been true since the very beginning of the church. In many of Paul's letters to the early church we encounter communities that struggled with misunderstanding, competing theologies, and disunity in how they were to worship and serve Jesus.

The church is not perfect and it never has been. And as a pastor in the presbyterian church, I have a unique view at the imperfections of our denomination. But I still choose this church, this denomination, in spite of its flaws and brokenness. So why do I choose to be presbyterian?

In the letter to the Ephesians, the author writes, "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Our calling to be faithful members of the body of Christ, to have unity, is a difficult calling. Some churches find unity by creating an extensive set of doctrines or rules or theologies and then says, if you want to be a part of this church, you will agree to all of these rules. And when their is decision, the elders take care of it, "Here is the exit." And man have I sometimes wished that we did this, it would be much easier if we could all simply agree on everything. But the truth is, the history of the church is filled with faithful people who disagree with one another. For that matter, the whole of the Bible is filled with faithful people who attempt to create a nice, neat box to place their faith and to place God in, and all through the Bible we see where God breaks out of those small boxes and reminds us that God is infinite and mysterious. That we cannot limit God's love. As presbyterians we believe in faithful diversity is essential to our spiritual well being. We believe that we can disagree with one another and still do so with humility and gentleness. We believe that there is room at the table for our difference of faith as long as we agree to live with patience and to bear with one another in love. We believe that unity is created in the bond of peace. We are a Big Tent church and I am thankful for the diversity that both challenges and helps me grow. It not only means that there is room for those I disagree with, but it also means that there is room for me. That is grace, that is love.

In the last sentence of our text from Ephesians, we find the calling - "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." In todays culture we have raised the value of rugged individualism, the notion that I can do it alone, I am my own person without the need for anyone else. The church has struggled with this cultural mindset as people of decided they don't need a community of faith, but they could be faithful alone. And even the church struggles with the notion that we can go it alone, that we don't need to care about other congregations, other worshipping communities. If we take care of White Lick, that is all that matters.

But we have always been called into community, connected and knit together as one body. Not just one congregation, but as a network of congregations joined together by Christ to be his hands of love and care in the world. As presbyterians, we not only say we are connectional, but we live out that connection in the way we organize our church. It is a combination of lay leaders who are ordained as elders and ministers who are ordained as pastors that lead the church at every level. We do not have a bishop or group of bishops, but instead each congregation sends pastor and elder representation at the regional and national levels. Each of these representatives come with the faith and knowledge they have gained from the local congregations and together they seek to guide the church to be faithful and just. This same connectional understanding calls us to reach out and care for our sisters and brothers in our neighboring congregations - to not see one another as competitors, but as different parts of the body of Christ seeking to do our part in serving the Lord. We believe in the priesthood of all believers and that the Body of Christ is more than one congregations, but it is all believers working together, building up the church and the world in love.

There are many other reasons I stay in the presbyterian church. I love that we are inclusive of women, that we understand that God has created us Male and Female and yet has not made one gender less qualified to lead than the other. I love that presbyterians understand the value of education. From our very beginnings we have required our clergy to be educated and we believed our nation would be bettered by a more educated population. Thus presbyterians were some of the earliest christians to head west and help create some of our most historic colleges and universities. Not only do we believe in education, but we believe that we are called as disciples to continually seek greater and deeper and new understandings. Part of our reformed tradition is that we are reformed and always being reformed. That is to say, God is not done working in creation, redeeming and creating. We are a people who continually seek what God is doing in the world.

Many of us have thought about our faith in Jesus and our reason for worshiping in a church, most of us here today have thought about why we come to White Lick. But I hope you will leave today thinking about why it matters that we are presbyterian - and though we are broken, thanks be to God that we still have light and hope to offer the world.