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Wintering Well 6 "Love One Another"

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4.2)

Love! A Summary of the last few weeks ...

Being a Follower of Jesus

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." (Matt 4.19)

What kind of Calling?

Gabrielle's story ...

"As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (Ephesians 4.1)

The calling of the gospel itself summons us to believe in Jesus as risen Lord and king, and give him complete and undivided allegiance of our lives. **"I urge you ..."** Paul's exhortation to lead a life that matches your life calling – a balance between your profession and your practice. **"...the calling you have received."**

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called ..." (v.4) a hope birthed and centered in King Jesus who has conquered death itself – for all who give him their allegiance.

It then becomes less hard, less onerous to **"Be completely humble and gentle, patient, (bearing) with one another in love."** (v.2). We have, after all, **"one Spirit, just as (we) were called to one hope..."** (v.4). We are members of the same body and sharers in the same spirit. We all possess the same hope. **"humble"**, humility that as a Christian virtue stands directly opposite to the highhandedness of the world. **"gentle ..."** having considerateness and restraint of self, controlled by Godly character. **"patient"** Patience – a characteristic of God himself, being resolute in endurance and prepared to suffer without retaliation. **"...bearing with one another in love"** putting up with others faults, their idiosyncrasies, knowing we have them ourselves. The recurring theme in Ephesians is love, and it is found in all four of these virtues, humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance.

Christian group cohesion is centered in the presence of the person of Christ through the Spirit. It was the call **"Follow me"** leaving old values and measurements of character behind and risking exploring love – the new measurement of character.

Few small groups and churches see themselves as family, in a privatized and individualized culture. But Jesus talking to a despised Samaritan at a well, a woman at that, (Jn 4.27 **"Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman."**) shows his true followers, his disciples, new patterns of human relationship .

Putting on a (domestic) apron of authority – Jesus shows a new way to exercise authority, he washes the disciple's feet (Jn13:1-5). **"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power ..."** (v.3), **"... the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus."** (v.2) so what does Jesus do in light of this power and the obvious threat to his life? He puts on an apron!! "...so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist" (v.4)... **"... and began to wash his disciples feet ..."** (v.5)

What does our Christian call look like when it comes to loving one another? "Jesus said to his disciples **"Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me."** (Matt 16.24)

A Call to Follow and Love

Paul, again to the Ephesians in Chapter 4, reflects on God's empowering grace which equips them to serve God. As we have already noted in verse 2 he writes (as also Debbie Veale has considered in Colossians 3:12-13, two weeks ago) **"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."** And in verses 7 and 10 he notes **"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it."** V.7) **"He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe."** (v.10) (In order that he might give gifts – equip his people. v.8).

Jesus' leadership style, his grace-filled use of power was counter to every cultural norm then as it is today. He wasn't into getting, grabbing, keeping, snatching, controlling and retaliating. He became a leader who saw power in terms of giving, serving, welcoming, forgiving, giving of himself and walking the way of the cross.

When we sense that the body of Christ, the Church is adrift without direction and leadership, when we sense that

Jesus is asleep (as it were) in the stern of the boat, seemingly uncaring (Mk 4.35-41) this becomes the overriding spirit and reality of the Church. The old nature in us rises up, seeks to control and manipulate, spread innuendo, conquer and divide for our own gain. We devour one another as we over-react and under-react emotionally. All the time Paul's words to the Romans in Chapter 13, verses 8 and 9 ring out and remind us **"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law."** The commandments, **"You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet,"** and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** One of Paul's central motifs is gratitude. He has turned the whole question of debt on its head. The debt to love is the only form of debt Paul permits. The one enduring commandment taken into all the commandments is that we are to love, as we are loved.

A Unity to Guard

In verse 3 of Ephesians 4 Paul writes **"make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."** And in verses 5 and 6 he notes of believers that we have **"... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."** He is in effect saying guard the unity which Jesus has paid the price for. Celebrate and be united in your faith just as you have been empowered and equipped to be. When you are so much one in everything ("one Lord, one faith, ... etc.) mount a guard over that unity.

Unity was of central importance to Paul. We find it hard to comprehend how central it was because of how accustomed we have become to many divisions within the worldwide church. The fact that we live according to the ways of this world, the old and sinful nature, means that we cannot fully accept and live in God's new nature, and we will **"bite and devour each other"** (Galatians 5:15).

Jesus is in no doubt. We are to be people, instead of biting and devouring, to live in his **"new commandment."** He said **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** (John 13:34-5). The newness of the command is not that it has never been heard before. The newness is that in Jesus the depth and type of this love is profound – **"as I have loved you."** To slave, washing another's feet, the overflow of life-giving service, and the unprotesting submission of oneself to die a horrible death is all for the sake of others. Only indestructible love, our solidarity of love in a hostile world, will see us through and will be a witness to the pagan world. **"By this"** (by this love, by this love alone) **"everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** (v.35)

The most often repeated command in the New Testament is to "love one another." It is repeated 16 times, and is repeated more times than "be devoted," "accept," "have concern for" "carry one another's burdens" "forgive one another," "submit," "pray for," "confess your sins," (The late) Francis Schaeffer once observed that "love among Christians is the final apologetic. It is the definitive mark of the disciples of Jesus." .” The definitive mark of Christians is not, therefore, growth and numbers, buildings, finances, evangelism, missions. It is love, love **"as I have loved you."** It is all of the other 'one anothers' all added together and wrapped up in **"love one another;"**

As Tom Wright has commented, "If I lived in a house all by myself and nobody ever came to stay I would, in a sense, be totally free, but I happily choose the different freedom which comes through relationships, through love, which set me free in a quite different way."

When I disregard the Command and go AWOL.

Because I live in this world, and always have ... (Don't ask a fish what the water is like). But, no...!

"Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you belonged to the world, do you submit to it's rules?" ... "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Colossians 2:20 & 23)

'He Aint Heavy He's My Brother' ...

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP STUDY

- 1). In an age where a good job is hard to come by, where we have to assert ourselves (so the world tells us) to get ahead, what do you think of the notion that to follow Jesus means seeking the character of God first and foremost?
- 2). How should that calling change, if any, my attitude to others, especially Christian brothers and sisters?
- 3). What kind of hope is a hope birthed in humility, gentleness, patient and bearing with one another? What are the pluses and minuses in having such characteristics?
- 4). Have you ever been part of a fellowship where Jesus just doesn't seem present (or asleep in the stern of the boat)?