

## Ephesians 4:1-16

### Oneness

Sports has a way of bringing people in nations together. The Summer Olympics are in full swing at this time and it is a time of national pride for each country as they watch, cheer, and mourn with athletes. Our hearts burst with pride as one of our own stands upon a podium receiving their gold, silver, or bronze medal. We cheer and maybe even hold our breath as athletes, whether in individual sports or team sports go head-to-head with others. Sometimes we know that our representatives are not going to win, but we rejoice with them in their achievement or grieve with them in their heart-breaking loss.

For those that are following the Olympics we find ourselves not only supporting our nation's athlete's but others as well. And we watch athletes themselves support and come together as they all aspire to greatness and let's face it, not all of us have the capacity to become Olympic athletes.

This is unity in diversity at its best. Though there can be and is controversy, one of the opportunities for the Olympics is that the world is brought together in hope, compassion, and joy through this sporting event.

It kind of feels like Paul is on the sideline of an Olympics while he writes the letter to the Ephesians. He is the coach, the commentator, the announcer, and the spectator all at once. He is also the one who has lived this experience and now he wants to share his experience and knowledge with those who are striving to be followers of Christ.

Paul set up the reader in Chapters 1-3 talking about God and what God has done and what that means for us and then says, .... "In light of all this, here's what I want you to do." At chapter four Paul starts getting practical. This is how you live all of this out.

Don't just walk but run! Get out there and start doing something that shows that you are a child of God and that you understand a little or a lot about what it means to live in faith. However, we are to do this with "humility and discipline – not in fits and start, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences." (v3)

There is so much in here that could be unpacked, yet Paul is not even close to done with just that statement. He has a lot more to say about unity that turns out is a gift from God, not something to be attained, but rather maintained. The writing continues in verse 4-6, "You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness."

In a world that is so divisive Christians are called to live in a way that is countercultural. We are to live a humble and disciplined life grounded in the love of God. Sadly, we don't do a very good job of that. Churches split, denominations split, families split. Human nature so often says, it's my way or the highway. And we need only look at how many different ways of being church there are to know that unity is a real challenge. There are thousands of different variations of church world wide. Thankfully there are also bodies that come together such as the World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches to name only two organizations that work to set aside differences so that churches can act as one, support one another, and speak to governments and others with one voice.

But what does this mean for us as we sit at church or at home?

Well to begin with we look to be in community. Oneness on our own is no challenge and not the kind of oneness that Paul was speaking about. Even God, who is one has three natures, of Creator or Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was their oneness, their love outpoured that made a creation that was to be beautiful in its love and care for all parts.

Jesus' desire for us to be one was expressed in John 17 verse 11 where in a prayer the night before he was to die, Jesus prays for his disciples, which now includes all of us who follow Jesus. He prays that they, the disciples, may be one, as we are one. The "we" being Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. God desires for humanity to be humble, to be disciplined, to pour out ourselves for each other in acts of love is in the very nature of God.

Still, Paul also notes that we are to be alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences. In other words, oneness does not mean everyone is the same. We may be traveling on the same road and in the same direction toward God, but we are very different people given many gifts in order to help one another. This help is to build up the body of Christ. That does not mean only in numbers. Yes, to have more people understand their value and place in the church is amazing, but in part that comes as a result of people being able to share their gifts...out pour their gifts... in response to God's love for them and because without each person's gift the people of God are not equipped in the same manner as they would be with all participating as fully as possible in bringing light and life to the world.

The way that is written in *The Message* by Eugene Peterson is so powerful. The words, "But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given [our] own gift... He handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with his gifts, filled earth with his gifts. He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.

I love that, “working within Christ’s body, the church, until we’re all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God’s Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.”

Sometimes we don’t know what our gifts are. There are ways to figure that out. Speak to others and they will be able to help you see how you have been gifted. Sometimes our gifts will be a surprise to us, other times it may be we are affirmed in what we already know. Maybe both. But there is no one walking the face of the earth that does not have a God given gift. It may need honing, it may need to be uncovered, but it and more will be there.

The wonderful part of Christ’s gifts is that they are never meant to be kept to oneself. Gifts of God are for the people of God to be shared in community and in our work to share God in the world through word, work, and worship. But we always go back to the words that say to do this with humility and discipline, not in first and starts, but steadily, pouring ourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.

When we struggle, we look to Christ. “We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. Christ keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.

If you are not part of the life of a community of faith, it may be time to look at that and find some place to settle in and get to work. If you are a part of a faith community but not active or enjoying sitting at home taking in words but not using your gifts in community, then it may be time to reengage in some way. This congregation and others need the fullness of all gifts to be who the loving active people of God in the world. If you are present in the church always look to how God is calling you and equipping you in the work of the whole.

From this place, knowing all that God is doing and invites us to, may we be one in God, one in Jesus Christ, and one in the Spirit, in hope, peace, love, and joy. Amen.