

Be Flame

A Sermon on Ephesians 4:1-16 by the Rev. Philip Major
St. Paul's ~ Syracuse, NY ~ August 1, 2021

I therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. I urge you to be your self. I urge you to be what God created you to be.

This is the message of the letter to the Ephesians. This letter was probably written by one of Paul's disciples. This person had read and studied Paul's letters, possibly including some of Paul's letters that we have never seen. The letter to the Ephesians lacks several of the distinctive features of Paul's letters. At the same time, portions of the letter express the fundamental themes of Paul's preaching in powerful ways.

In our reading from chapter four we hear two of these themes. The first theme is the importance of unity and community for followers of Christ. *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.*

You might have heard some of these words before; they are the first words of our baptismal liturgy. In baptism we welcome the baptized into a community of faith, not into a competition among individuals. We are a community, yet we are a community that thrives in our diversity.

This is the second theme. In our diversity, *each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and some teachers.* Each person carries within themselves a unique gift. The gifts we have been given are directly from God.

Do not be especially concerned with what others might be doing. Do not compare your life and your work to what others are doing. Do not be concerned with the way others might be judging your life and your productivity.

There are times when we don't see the brilliance of the gift God has given us. We look outside ourselves. We struggle and reach after gifts that have been given to others. We take for granted or minimize the unique gift God has given to us.

Consider the beauty and power of the gift God has placed in the center of your life. Trust me: there is no greater gift than the gift God has placed in the center of your life.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. God is calling you to be something beautiful and powerful. God is calling you to be fully your self.

I borrow the words of Bishop Singh in the Diocese of Rochester and say to you: Be light. Be flame. Be your self.

There is a gift within you. Let the gift of your life be like a flame for you and for others. Focus your energy and your attention on being the flame. Do not be distracted by the little things on the side of your life, the nagging fears and anxieties of your life. Be flame.

The gift God has placed in the center of your life is brilliant, like a flame. By this light one or two others will see their way forward. Observe that the flame of the candle burns brightly, but the light from the flame does not shine on the candle.

Be flame. Be light for the world. God has placed this light in the center of your life. Focus your energies on letting the light of your gift shine for the world. Remember that those who see by the light of a candle are not looking at the candle. They are seeing the world by the light of the candle. When your light is shining, others will probably not be looking at you.

Be light for the world. Be flame. Your flame is vulnerable to the harsh wind of the world. If you have ever tried to keep the flame of a candle from being extinguished by the wind, you know there is only one place of safety for the flame. The flame is only safe when it is next to a large rock. The rock protects the flame from the wind. God is your rock.

Move yourself next to God. Look for the place of calm, right next to God. Be light for the world. Be flame.