

“Learning to Walk Anew”

“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.”

Learning to walk is a milestone moment for a young child and their parents, the occasion when the child takes its first steps and begins to explore a world that was known only from a crawling position. After efforts to lift themselves up onto a chair or sofa, those first tentative steps are both frightening and exhilarating, and are usually accompanied by smiles and shouts of joy by both the child who is discovering a new world that has opened to them and for the parents who will always remember this occasion and often capture the moment on video to be shared with family and friends who did not experience this moment in person.

As excited as it is for us to learn to walk as children, we may find ourselves in a position where we need to learn to walk anew later in life. For anyone who has had a knee or hip replacement, this life-changing surgery is often followed by months of arduous physiotherapy so that the person can learn to walk again with their new joint. A person who has suffered a stroke also faces a similar ordeal of therapy and exercise in an attempt to regain strength in their affected limbs and regain the ability to walk with the accompanying freedom it offers. Persons who have experienced accidents are often faced with the challenges of learning to walk again on legs that have been surgically repaired so that what was lost in this episode might be regained. Learning to walk anew can be as monumental a moment as when we first learned to take our first steps as children.

While I have not yet experienced the physical challenge of learning to walk anew, this was one of the aspects of life that I learned when I joined our marching band in high school. Marching bands are very popular in the USA in both high schools and universities; if you ever watch a football game by one of the major schools such as Michigan or Ohio State, you will experience their magnificent bands that offer spectacular halftime shows throughout the football season. On a much smaller scale, our high school band also played the halftime shows at all our school’s football games; we also marched in local parades and participated in multi-band competitions and exhibitions. Marching band became a central part of my high school experience

and one of my early claims to fame, as I served as drum major of the band for several years. I especially remember my first year of high school and our first practice on the football field, when we had to learn the basics of marching as a unit. It was almost like we were being asked to learn to walk again, since marching in step with the other band members is something that does not come naturally. Our band director put us through many drills and would bark out directions and critiques until finally we were able to march in time and in step, so that it was as if the entire band was one unit marching in unison. While it soon became second nature, learning to walk as one unit was a major learning experience for anyone who wanted to become a member of the North Plainfield High School Marching Band.

While marching bands and other units that work to walk in unison are a fairly recent development, the importance of walking together as one is one of the lessons that Paul is teaching in today's second lesson. This marks a major transition in his letter to the Ephesians; in the first three chapters, Paul teaches the Christians in this region of Asia Minor about what it means to be a baptized child of God and a member of the Church which is the Body of Christ. For a community that has a diverse membership of both Jews and Gentiles, Paul reminds them that these former distinctions that has once separated them were no longer valid, since in Christ all are one and have been incorporated into "*the household of god, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone*" (2:19-20). He prays that these Christians among whom he had lived for three years may comprehend along with all the saints of God "*what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*" (3:18-19). It is through this empowerment of the Holy Spirit that Paul expresses the confidence that these Christians will be "*able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask for or imagine [so that] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*" (3:20-21).

In today's lesson, Paul shifts his focus from teaching his readers who they are and to whom they belong to what it means to live each day as a follower of Jesus Christ. Paul's letters frequently include sections of *paraenesis* (moral advice or admonition), offering his readers practical advice on how they are to live together as the Body of Christ in the world in which they live. The entire second half of the letter describes how Christians are to conduct themselves in light of what God has done for God's people in Christ. In this first section (4:1-16, Paul teaches that as each member strives for unity and fulfills his or her role in ministry, the Body of Christ advances toward maturity. Paul begins the section by describing himself as "*the prisoner of the Lord*" (4:1), a reminder of the suffering that Paul has endured

for the sake of the Gospel and that his readers may encounter as well. The way he begins this section is significant: “*I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called ...*” Paul’s primary purpose here is exhortation, an appeal to the will of his readers. The word that is translated “live” (*peripateo*) literally means “walk,” a common biblical motif for ethical behavior:

- “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinner tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and might.” – Psalm 1:1-2
- “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” – Micah 6:8.
- “Both of them [Zechariah and Elizabeth] were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.” – Luke 1:6.

Before the followers of Christ were known as “Christians,” they were referred to as followers of “the Way,” in accordance with Jesus’ teaching that “*if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*” (Matthew 16:24). The account of the conversion of Paul (then known as Saul of Tarsus) begins with the report that “*Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*” (Acts 9:1-2). Living as a Christian was not merely an intellectual assent to a set of beliefs about Jesus Christ; it meant learning to walk anew as a follower of Jesus Christ and conforming one’s life to what was expected of a person who was in Holy Baptism “*sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever*” (ELW Holy Baptism). God’s calling is to create a people who are devoted to walking together as disciples of Christ and as bearers of the Gospel message to all humanity. Such a walk involves qualities that are appropriate for followers of the Lord who came “*not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).:

- **Humility** was an attitude that the pagan world despised but was at the heart of Jesus’ sacrifice for the sake of the salvation of all people: “*And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross*” (Philippians 2:8). As followers of Christ, Christians were the first persons to regard humility as a virtue.

- **Gentleness** is a virtue of peacemakers, the inner strength not to retaliate when provoked. It is among the “fruit of the Spirit” that Paul lists in Galatians, which includes *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”* (Galatians 5:22-23).
- **Patience** is both a quality of God who is *“gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love”* (Joel 2:13) and a mark of a wise person (*“Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.”* (Proverbs 14:29).
- Such qualities are important as Christians are to make *“every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (4:3). “Peace” (*Eirene*) is a gift of the Spirit that goes far beyond social interest in community concord or a cessation of hostility; it refers to the fullness of salvation that comes from God (*:May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*” – Romans 15:13). Similar to the Hebrew word *shalom*, it is the peace that comes from the one *“who is our peace … [who] came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near”* (2:14, 17). It is *‘the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, [that] will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus’* (Philippians 2:7). It is through this gift of the peace of God that is bestowed upon the Church through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that they will be able to maintain their unity, which reflects God’s gift of reconciliation in Christ. The Church is not merely a human association but the continuing visible expression of the Messiah on earth. As Christ through his death and resurrection has created *“once new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace”* (2:15), through our baptism into Christ we have been called to the *“one hope of your calling”* (4:4), which is the blessing we await in the second coming of Christ and life with God forever. As we were baptized into Christ and joined to his one body the Church (*“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”* – Romans 6:5), we share a common faith in *“one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all”* (4:5-6). It is this common faith that is the foundation of our lives as the Church of Jesus Christ, and it is our call to make certain that this unity in Christ remains in our walk together as God’s people who are called to share this faith with all people.

While this unity is central to our identity as those who walk as children of God, Paul also emphasizes the uniqueness of each member of the Body of Christ when he goes on the proclaim that *“each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’ gift”* (4:7), which resembles Paul’s teaching in Romans that *“as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we who are*

many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” (Romans 12:4-5). Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18 (“*You ascended the high mount, leading captives in your train and receiving gifts from people, even from those who rebel against the LORD God’s abiding there*”) to reinforce the fact that Christ rose again and ascended into heaven “so that he might fill all things” (4:10), for “*God’s preordained plan becomes known only when Christ is exalted in the heavens, that he might fill all things with himself.*” (Pheme Perkins). The purposes of the gifts that Christ has bestowed on each member of the body of Christ is to prepare these persons to accomplish the ministry that our Lord has entrusted to God’s holy people. The list begins with the offices of “apostles, prophets, and evangelists.” Apostles and prophets have previously been mentioned as those whose activity has already been completed (“*In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit*” – 3:5). “Evangelists” are those who have been commissioned by the apostles to preach the Gospel (“*The next day we left and came to Caesarea; and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him.*” – Acts 21:8). “Pastors” are those who served as elders in the local faith communities of Asia Minor, while “teachers” appear in all Pauline lists of church offices, their work referring to both basic instruction and ongoing exhortation:

- “Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.” – Acts 20:28.
- “Those who re taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.” – Galatians 6:6.

In listing these offices of ministry, Paul “*begins with those functions connected with the founding of the community and moves on to those of local leaders.*” (Perkins). Paul emphasizes that the purpose of each of these offices past, present, and future is to “*equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*” (4:12). Such “ministry” (*diakonia*) covers a broad range of service such as hospitality, providing for the poor, and preaching and teaching the word; this ministry is carried out not only by some members, but by all the “holy ones,” the baptized believers whom their leaders have “equipped” for their callings to ministry in the name of Jesus Christ (“*Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.*” – Acts 6:3-4). The goal of all pastoral ministry and teaching is that the Church may “*come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ*” (4:13). Such “maturity” involves the

community as a whole, not merely particular individuals. Unity of faith, knowledge of the Son of God, mature, and the “measure of the full stature of Christ” are the equivalent of the “new humanity” created by Christ (2:15). This “maturity” of which Paul speaks is **corporate** maturity, “*fruitful ministry according to the diverse gifts of the members under the guidance of their particular pastors and leaders*” (Peter S. Williamson). Paul contrasts this maturity with a call to resist a return to childishness: “*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*” (4:14). Such “trickery” and “deceitful scheming” can lead the elect astray. The deceit of false teachers is addressed in later New Testament writings (“*For they speak bombastic nonsense, and with licentious desires of the flesh they entice people who have just escaped from those who live in error.*” – 2 Peter 2:18). “Deceitful scheming” may also suggest a demonic source of false teaching (“*Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*” – 6:11). Rather than being deceived and unstable, Christians should be living the truth; they are to speak the truth in love (*agape*), which is the key to communal solidarity. Paul urges his readers to live in the truth out of a desire for the good of others, acting in love. The result of “living the truth in love” will be that the Body of Christ will “*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*” (4:15-16). Maturity means growing in union with Christ; “*the Church can be strengthened only if her members conduct their relationships and fulfill their ministries in love*” (Williamson).

- “In Ephesians, unity is not the same as uniformity. The mystery of God that is revealed in Christ and results in the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles does not obliterate the distinctions between these different groups. Instead, what is made known through the church is ‘the wisdom of God in its rich variety’ (3:10). Part of the call of 4:1-16 is to tolerance, or ‘bearing with one another’ (4:2). The assumption is not that all distinctions will cease, but that even with the persistence of differences, the church may nevertheless grow together as a body.” – Susan Hylen.

As we are joined to one another as the one Body of Christ in Baptism, so are we called to walk together as God’s holy people for the sake of the mission of Christ that has been entrusted to us. Learning to walk together can be as challenging as learning to walk anew following surgery or injury. It is learning to think not only of ourselves, but of the needs of others in our walk as people of faith. It is a process of learning to “*do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.*” (Philippians 2:3). As our marching band needed

to learn to march together so that we might fulfill our potential as a musical unity, may we march together in the light of God so that we might fulfill Christ's purpose for his body, to be the people who will fulfill Christ's mission to be witnesses to our Lord's steadfast love in all generations to the ends of the earth. May we learn to walk anew for the sake of the love of God who has made us one in Christ!

Amen.