

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2022**  
**Ephesians 4: 4:1-7, 11-16**  
**Rev.Scott Burton**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

Sermon keypoints:

- Unity over Disunity
- Giving over Getting
- Maturity over Immaturity

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's word:

Come Holy Spirit and soften our hearts to the word of God.

Come Holy Spirit and mature us in the ways of Jesus.

Come Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Over the summer I bought a second-hand bike because Hope was starting to learn without stabilizers and so I wanted to be able to ride with her and it was some time ago that my bike got stolen when I lived in Edinburgh. And so, I got, I decided to get a road bike because there's quite a few guys in church and others I think that cycle and this isn't me, I don't look that good on a bike, but they've been good to get out with me and coax me along and pass on their knowledge and skills and encouragement. And it wasn't long before I felt that, well you know, the second-hand bike maybe needs to be tweaked here or there or I need this bit of kit or that bit of equipment and, yes, there is some Lycra involved along the way. If you think I look better in Lycra then I'll give you some other names another time, I wouldn't name them publicly, he just happens to be playing the drums. Anyway, like most sports, there's various levels of involvement, isn't there. There's that kind of low level, it's not very serious and you're just doing it for a bit fun. And then, there's that kind of mid-level, and that's probably where I'm at with most things in life probably, I get a wee bit serious and I want this and I want that just to be able to do it fairly well and not look like an idiot. And then, there's that kind of higher level of competitiveness, of wanting to be maybe the best or just do really seriously and so, I guess, the image on screen is that kind of person and they have found something which has become really important to them and so they'll adapt so much of life. They'll maybe give up time, and then maybe invest time in pursuit of this. So, maybe look at their diet and what they should eat or not eat. What they need to detox from to make sure their body is in peak physical condition, so they can be the best of the best, because they've found something they really care about and they want to pursue it wholeheartedly.

And, in our passage today, Paul said these words 'I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.' I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Last week we touched on the calling we have from Jesus, the calling to follow Him, to make Him known, because He's called us to be part of His family, part of His people and Paul says this is a high calling worthy of giving your life for, wholeheartedly of wanting to aspire and pursue a life which is worthy of that calling, it's worth striving for and giving yourself to. And he will then spend the next three chapters of this letter getting into details and specifics, looking at all different facets of individual and corporate life, things that we should avoid, things that we should invest in, things we should pursue, things we should flee from. And we're just focusing on the first little

portion of that for today, because our series, just now, is following some of the chapters in this little book *Anatomy of a Revived Church*. It's quite difficult to actually get a copy, you'll probably need to go online although we're trying to source some in case you want to pick up a copy and read it for yourselves. Over the next four weeks I'm either going to be on annual leave, moving house or preaching up at Blackbraes and Shieldhill, I think, this month and as part of the pulpit swap so I felt that it wasn't really fair to give the next chat or a particular chapter to those guest speakers because the next chapter that we're going to look at today is dealing with toxins. Dealing with toxins, and the author found in his research that a repeating theme of churches that were growing that new degree of flourishing, whereas one time they had maybe been declining, was that they dealt with toxins and particularly, particularly, people who created a toxic environment.

He writes at the end of the chapter 'If a toxic member is allowed to continue his or her pattern of negativity and disunity, the church will decline. It may die. Dealing with toxic church members is exceedingly difficult but not dealing with them assures decline will continue.' Now let me put it on record, it's on recording as well, I don't think we have any toxic members, as far as I know, however, there are patterns of thought and behavior we can all slip into from time to time which, if we don't name and then don't seek to deal with, they have all the potential of undermining our health as a church family and stifling the growth we might see, and certainly not living a life worthy of the calling we've received.

The little portion gives us three things to think about from chapter four and in each case we're going to look at what Paul teaches but then, what's the negative side of that, what's the thing we need to detox from if we're going to live this worthy life. And so, Paul begins by saying 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There's one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.' He begins by highlighting our unity, what we have in common, what we share, what binds us together, that we are one body, we are one faith through our one Lord and it's that that we begin with today. That we have to make every effort to maintain that unity, to pursue it. This is worth pursuing. And so, he encourages us. Are we a people who pursue and maintain unity? Well, I think largely we do get on very well but there can be practices, as I say, that we can slip into which might embody or even nurture this unity and I want to flag this up for us. Two of them in particular.

The first is withdrawal. Sometimes something said or done or not done and it causes a degree of hurt, maybe offence, we struggle with it for whatever reason. It might be something that is said by another member, maybe something said or done by me, either in the pulpit, in the service, and changes that we've experienced, something I'll say in private or on email or whoever knows what it might be. But because of that we then disengage, we withdraw, we avoid others, we keep our distance, we don't talk to them, if we see them in the same room, if they're going one way, we'll go the other way and if we happen to be in conversation with them well, we'll try and get out of that as soon as possible and we certainly won't ask any questions because we don't really care enough about them. All those hallmarks of withdrawal are hallmarks of disunity not unity. And so, withdrawal might be a practice where we need to curtail and do something about it.

Another one is echo chambers. If you're not familiar with the term then all you need to do is listen to the party conferences that are happening because a lot of them are echo chambers, really, where we share our perspective with people who agree with our perspective and we just hear the echo and if we hear the positive things back then we think 'Oh, that's a good thing.' and if we hear negative things back we think 'Well, we're onto a winner, we know that that's a wrong thing and it needs dealing with.' And that happens a lot at these conferences but it can happen in church as well. We can end up talking to people who just agree with us and because we hear back what we're saying we think 'Well, my perspective is right. This may be the only perspective and it's got to be taken on board and it's got to be a, something's got to be done about it, and those that are not doing something about it well, they're making mistakes and they're doing things wrong.' And, before you know it, we just there into this downward spiral of negativity and it's nurturing disunity. Echo chambers. We need to be careful of them.

So, how do we detox from disunity and pursue unity? Well, Paul gives us some ideas. 'Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another and love.' Be completely humble he says. Have a lowliness of mind, is what that means. Don't be prideful, don't think you know all the answers and you know best, be gentle, have a meekness of spirit where you're ready to admit wrongs and that you don't have all the answers, don't be about asserting your rights. This is about strength that's under control. Be patient or long-suffering. One author, one translator put it to 'have a wide and big soul.' To have a wide and big soul. To bear with one another, to put up with one another. We're people, we're messy people, we're gonna rub each other the wrong way sometimes and so, let's be quick to forgive and ready to forgive as the Lord has forgiven us and to do so in love. And in love in the Bible is not just an emotion, the love of God is an act of the will, a choice and we too should show that kind of love, the love that Jesus has shown, that was sacrificial, that sought the welfare of others, that didn't wait for them to make up their mind, didn't wait for you and I to respond before He first showed love. Friends, if we are going to pursue unity over disunity, then let's give up withdrawal and instead press in. Let's offer a smile, let's care, let's ask questions of those people we'd normally avoid and, if they've done something, if I've done something, then forgive. And, rather than an echo chamber of negativity, can we have a wide and big soul where we die to self, we give up pride and we seek out people that are different from us, who have a different perspective from us and we listen to them.

One of the things that I've sought to do is when I've found that someone is struggling with something that I've done or doing more often than not, I've gone and given them the time to explain why they struggle and that's hard, really hard sometimes, it gets very personal but it's worth doing, it's more often than not we've come to an agreement and an understanding of one another but it's what we need to do, it's what we need to model because we're called to unity over disunity because that's one hallmark of a worthy life, a life a way of life that might lead to greater health as a congregation. And I hope that you will pursue that along with me.

Paul has focused on what we share in common, on what unites us, but he also knows that it can be within unity a healthy diversity and so he goes on to say 'But to each one

of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up as each part does its work.' Each of us has been given something by Jesus, something to use to serve others he's given us grace in the form of spiritual gifts and we have to use those. Whether it's teaching or leading, whether it's caring or encouraging, administrating or sharing, we've all got something to give, we've all got a part to play. All of us. And a life worthy of our calling sees a people who give of themselves to their church family and who give themselves to the purposes of Jesus in and through them. Are we a people who give over getting? Because it's very easy, in all aspects of life, including church life, to slip into becoming very me-focused, me-focused and when we become very me-focused it can show up in conversations like 'I want Church to be like this or that' or that group or that person or that individual is not meeting my needs and that's not to say that you don't have needs or that those needs are unimportant, they are important, but when we get into a downward spiral of focusing on our needs, we can end up blaming. We talked about blaming last week, or we can end up complaining, moaning. I have a six-year-old and there are times when I need to say 'Hope, what are you doing?' and she knows how to finish that statement 'I'm moaning.' Are we really six-year-old Christians? Or do we know another way? Because the people that I look at who are doing less blaming and complaining are those who focus on giving, of giving themselves to others, building them up and serving the purposes of Jesus in their day, in their life. But this me-focus can also be seen in other ways. It can be seen in us saying 'Well, I'm just too busy to be involved in church.' And we get too busy maybe through work or kids or grandkids or hobbies but you've got a part to play and if you're too busy to turn up to be involved in some area of church life then actually, you're depriving the wider family of the gift God has given you, which is not for you, but for others. And so, if you're too busy to be involved, you're depriving others, you're missing out on that worthy life. We can also show that me-focus by just not turning up to church. We can say 'Well, I'm too busy or I'm just not interested you know, the style of the sermon, the style of the service, it's changed. I don't like it anymore. He rabbits on too long.' Sometimes, yes. But actually, it just displays a focus upon ourselves because you could end up having a conversation like Allison had with Nadia, like so many of us have on a Sunday, and we give that listening ear, we give that reassurance, we're able to maybe provide a practical help in that moment but, if you're not there, if you're not turning up, then that person's going to miss out. You have a part to play. We each have a part to play and if we're to detox from getting and pursue giving, well, we need to turn up, we need to play our part, we need to make church and a Sunday service less about us and more about God and His purposes and His people. And I would love for folks to come to me more often than not and say 'You know, I've got this idea and I'm happy to help and let's pursue this. What do you think?' I can't really think of many examples in four years where I've said no to such an idea but I can tell you the number of times of people who have come and they've just moaned at me. I'm going to respond much better to a solution than to a moan because we're family and we have to be focused on giving and using what we have and building each other up, than getting, and about church being about me, mine and I, and that might require some tough conversations. Some cutting back. Of seeing church less as a hobby and more is something you belong to. And that could be about re-prioritizing things, even with our kids maybe, with our families, maybe with one

another. We're too busy doing maybe, other stuff and we need to say 'Well, church is not a hobby, it's not another thing on the list, it's something I belong to because I belong to Jesus.' And, if we want to live a worthy life, if we want to be a healthy congregation, then we must detox from a mindset of getting and pursue a life of giving.

And in our final portion Paul has one other area of church life to look at. He says in the middle of the, near the end of that chapter, that section, 'Then we will no longer be infants blown here and there by every wind of teaching. Instead, speaking the truth and love, we will grow to become, in every respect, the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.' Part of living a worthy life is growing in maturity, as he says. That as we mature in the ways of Jesus, as we grow in our love for one another and for our community, and give ourselves away rather than focus on getting, as we display a unity that is just not possible, should not be possible unless God was in it, then people might take notice. They might say 'Well, there's something going on in that church, and they've loved me like no one has loved me, and they they're for each other like no one is for each other, that I've seen anywhere else. What's different about them?' and then we get to say 'Well, it's because of Jesus, because He's not just an idea and He's not just a guy in a book. He's alive and real and He's part of my life and He's answering prayers and He's doing all these incredible things.' And so, because we mature and show His way of life, then it brings glory to Him who is our Head. Of course, the opposite of maturity is immaturity and there can be practices that belie an immaturity. The verses here particularly focus on speech. Paul says 'Every wind of teaching' i.e. the hot air, it's people who are full of hot air, and not just any old hot air but teaching that draws you away from Jesus, is what he's talking about here. That kind of hot air and the corrective of that is speaking the truth in love. So, speech is very much at the forefront here, a maturity of speech. So, how does your speech compare? Is it mature or immature? Do you fly off the handle, get angry? Do you criticize and complain? Do you gossip? Do you use vulgar language? Or, are you someone who's encouraging, who builds others up, who champions others? Are you that kind of person? Are you that? Are you displaying mature speech, Godly speech? You might say 'Well, you know Scott, I'm speaking the truth in love. Truth is sometimes hard to hear but I just need to get it off my chest and it'll make, it'll make church better.' Well, I'm afraid that's not what that phrase means. Speaking the truth in love is speaking the truth of Jesus because the verse before it is all about false teaching. So, to speak the truth is to speak the truth of Jesus, His character, His ways, His purposes. That's what we're to speak, to speak His word, to say this is who He is and this is the encouragement, just as Alison did to Nadia. She spoke truth, she spoke it in love, she wanted the best for Pre5s, she wanted them to be bold and to make every opportunity and what did it do? It built up, it encouraged, it equipped them and so they were ready and Nadia was ready, to take that opportunity. That's what it means to speak the truth in love. It's not about you getting it off of your chest what you're really bothered about, it's not about us getting our own way, if only our perspective was shared. That's not speaking the truth in love. It might be speaking your truth but it's not speaking the truth, the truth of Jesus. So, once again, what will you choose? Is the calling of Jesus important enough to you that you'll detox from old patterns and instead pursue a maturity of speech? I hope so friends, I hope so brothers and sisters, because God is not bringing this to our attention to beat us up, to wear us

down. I was having my devotions yesterday just using Lectio 365 as I often do and if you don't use it I encourage you to maybe consider using it, and in there just the perfect day before today to just put it out there for me to take note of it Jesus says in John chapter 15, 'I am the true vine and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You know friends, Brightons has been fruitful that there are so many here on a Sunday when in the Upper Braes some churches are lucky if they get a dozen or 20 people, those churches have no children, no children on a Sunday morning and we have a goodly number who make a nice noise and we're thankful for them, we have been fruitful but there's even more fruitfulness to come if we'll only take on board what God is bringing to our attention and I think that's why he wants us to have a look at this Anatomy of a Revived Church so that we might be, that we might be even more fruitful. He's got good in store for us such as our loving good God who we've been thankful for today not only for the harvest, not only for testimony but because, through His Word, through the work of His Spirit amongst us, He wants to bring us even into greater days and so I pray that we would be a people who pursue unity over disunity, giving over getting, and maturity over immaturity. I pray it may be so. Amen.