

“Communal Calling to Love”
B Pentecost 10, Ephesians 4:1-16
August 1, 2021; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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Unity in the Body of Christ

⁴ I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.”

⁹ (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended^[a] into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ 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.

I. WONDERING ABOUT CALLING

Do you ever wonder? Wonder why we are here? What is the purpose of this life, in these times? Ever wonder what your purpose in life is supposed to be? What your calling is?

Ever wonder if you’ve found your calling—yet—no matter what age or stage of life? Many of you are retired—from one or many former careers or vocation. And, you’ve talked with me about “finding your calling” in this current or next season of life.

It’s so important to our souls that we not ever feel like the best of our lives and purpose are behind us. They’re not! I can assure you of that! No matter what season of life each of us is in. God’s calling to us is not about career—though it might find fulfillment for a time there—in the various careers we’ve had over the years, inside and outside the home, serving humanity in any number of settings.

Ever wonder? I do. I wonder what this means here in today’s scripture:

“to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called”—what on earth that means?! For me, for you, for the original community Paul was writing to?

I wonder what that might mean for us—individually and communally—right here and now, this week, this month, this next season in our lives and in our congregation. It’s an important wondering to do together—even more so as the world changes daily around us in the midst of this pandemic.

What is the calling to which we are called—whether worshiping inside or out, in person or on zoom? Whether small or large in number, energy and service projects? What is Spirit calling us to, today—in these times, in this season, as we are “all in this together”—in spirit, but yes, in Body—as the Body of Christ—wherever we are on life’s journey. Wherever we are, period.

II. WONDERING ABOUT CALLING—Communal

4 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ

I think it hasn't changed much in 2000+ years. From way back in the Hebrew Scriptures, through to Jesus' times to now. We are to: Stay steady. Don't be tossed about – easily swayed or caught up in conflicting messages of the times.

III. GIVEN WHAT WE NEED—NOT ALONE

Thank God, there is good news in this too! We are not alone; in fact, we are given what we need.

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said, "he gave gifts to his people."

Horse Story—God goes ahead of us. Sometimes Spirit bumps, pokes, prods or nudges us from behind as well!

A horse named Tessa recently joined our family. We didn't know as much about her previous life as we thought, and soon learned that she had a little trepidation about water! I tried to ride her across a raging ditch—all of two feet wide!—and she was having none of it.

At our place in Fairplay, the creek runs right through, so the horses drink heartily, and also romp across to the other side to nibble on the lush grass on the other side and check out the world from that vantage point.

Tessa would *not* follow her sisters, no matter how much coaxing, leading, shaking grain, cajoling, and bumping on the rump with

a rope we tried. So, I spent some time countless days helping her to "make friends with the water." I would lead her right to it and step off the edge, and she would *almost* step in, too, until she realized what she was doing! Then, back out, almost running me over—or not *almost*! We twirled a rope around and around, trying to *drive* her in and smack her back and day after day, nothing worked!

One day, I decided to don different shoes and do whatever it takes! I led her down to the creek and walked right off the shore, onto the rocks and out into the middle. Before she knew it, she had walked right in with me! The look on her face as she looked down at all four hooves with cool water running over them and rocks beneath, was priceless! Such a look of surprise—but success as well!

We stood there for several minutes, side by side, in the middle of the creek. She was obviously trying to tell me something all along, "I need you to walk *beside* me. Not make me go somewhere you're not willing to go, too!"

After we paused and she was reassured, we traversed through the slightly deeper water and on up the other bank. We were ecstatic! She discovered the lush green grass there and nibbled awhile. Then we ventured back into the creek, with Sister Diamond cheering us on from the other side. Tessa hesitated only slightly and I stepped carefully, knowing it's horse-nature to run over a person and think about flying through the air to the other side instead of gently walking through.

But she was perfect! She calmly stepped into the creek by my side, and matched my every step all the way home. Never spooked, never bumped me—a perfect walking companion. And there was great rejoicing on the other side! We high-fived, hoof to hand. We celebrated and she was rewarded with lots of loves and pats and treats. Good girl!

I wonder. I wonder if our walk with God isn't a lot like this? God does lead us from behind and before, nudges us forward

into the frightening unknown, and tries to reassure us over and over that the water is fine and we should step on in.

But, we resist, don't we? We pace back and forth on the shore, even with our sisters calling to us from the other side; even with treats waiting for us; even with all sorts of coaxing and prodding by the One we know we can trust.

I wonder how many times Spirit has to step *right* into the water with us, come alongside and stay there—reminding us over and over that She is not asking us to go anywhere She's not walking right with us, getting Her feet wet too!

On Cowboy Church day I shared with you about my old gray mare, Satin, who—though “not what she used to be” in terms of physical fitness and even ability to walk and run—thus she's had to be retired from riding—still, after all these years and all she's been through, STILL has a “spirit of TRY.” That's unparalleled and inspirational.

Tessa has a little of that spirit, but it's a growing edge for her. We can learn so much from the spirit of animals, in our facing new challenges. Satin wasn't always the bravest either—I well remember trying to pony her across the creek when she wouldn't go by herself, and she startled in fear so badly that my brother-in-law Steve, who was ponying her, landed on his backside (bad back he had already!), on a rock, on the bottom of the creek.

It's helpful to look back and remember, when facing our fears and challenges, that others have not always been confident and sure in their moving forward *either!* As I train Tessa, connecting with her spirit, and assuring her she can trust me, walking her down to the creek and encouraging her to take a step into water more times than I can count, that I once did that with Satin—over and over again.

I'd guess that God does this with us! Remembers our ancestors—those who went before us in the faith and in life. Remembers

that gentle leading, cajoling and coaxing are always needed to overcome our fears of going forward into the great unknown.

The Children of Israel were reminded many times over in the Hebrew Bible stories, “Remember your fathers and mothers in the Faith”—how God led them out of Egypt—a familiar yet unfree place and life—and led them into the Promised Land—a land flowing with milk and honey.

Remember in your own life, and that of your community, how many, many times, your God has been faithful—good for his Promises. Remember that God is the same God—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of Sarah and Rachel, Miriam and Rebecca. The God of all our saints right here at CUCC—a beloved list of names too long to name today, but we name them often as we walk around the church building and gardens, and call out their names in memory over 141 years.

God, our Creator, Spirit Sustainer and Redeemer, leads us forward—into that creek. Whether raging waters or a mere trickle or a ditch; sometimes over slippery rocks or sand that makes us feel like we're sinking. Spirit nudges from behind and before, calling us forward to the calling to which we have been called. Yet God does not simply smack us on the behind and demand that we venture forth without the gifts we need and the companionship on the Way.

Spirit steps into the water with us, walks right alongside, not asking us to do anything She is not also willing to do. Showing us the way, by our side, and celebrating with great cheers and affection when we give it a good TRY, get our feet wet, and move forward to the lush grass and beautiful land of promise on the other side.

IV. COMMUNING AROUND OUR CALLING COME ALONGSIDE ONE ANOTHER

We are not just walking alone into the water, with even “just” the Spirit of God walking alongside us. We are walking—

together—with one another on the other end of that rope! We extend a lifeline to each other every day, every step of the way. That is what being the Body of Christ is. Being the Church. Belonging to a Church Family

We come alongside, offer a nudge and encouragement to keep moving forward. Keep being brave and facing our fears and challenges. Even when the waters rage, the clouds start to form overhead, the thunder rumbles off in the distance, the COVID numbers climb, the fears of illness and the unknown seem to overshadow our beautiful sunny day.

Even then.

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us 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.... we grow up in every way into Christ.

So, what is our “calling to which we have been called?”

We ARE already and always are becoming, “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.”

Let us come to the Table. Come as you are. Come from wherever you are in that stream, and on that journey. Whether barely willing to leave the safety of the land’s edge, or thinking about giving it a try—putting a hoof out into the refreshing, cool water. Whether you’re already well-equipped and experienced and courageous, and calling from the other side of the creek with words and neighs of encouragement.

You might be happily enjoying the land flowing with milk and honey over there (or really lush, green grass) and your calling is to be calling! “Come on in! The water is fine! The banquet is

amazing and delicious! You can do this! It’s not frightening at all. You are welcome here. Welcome to this Table, which is spread for all. Spread with bread and wine, welcome and warmth. Love and belonging without limit.

Come to the Table. Let us BE the Body of Christ together—bringing all our gifts and parts and offerings—all equipped. For no special skills or credentials are needed here at all—just LOVE!

Amen.