

**THE PSALM**

**Psalm 130**

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.  
<sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice!  
 Let your ears be attentive  
 to the voice of my supplications!  
<sup>3</sup> If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,  
 Lord, who could stand?  
<sup>4</sup> But there is forgiveness with you,  
 so that you may be revered.  
<sup>5</sup> I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
 and in his word I hope;

<sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord  
 more than those who watch for the  
 morning,  
 more than those who watch for the  
 morning.  
<sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the LORD!  
 For with the LORD there is steadfast love,  
 and with him is great power to redeem.  
<sup>8</sup> It is he who will redeem Israel  
 from all its iniquities.

**THE EPISTLE**

**Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16 Bible p. 1066 (LP, NT p.236)**

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

<sup>7</sup> But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift...

<sup>11</sup> The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>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.

**Reader:** The Word of the Lord.

**People:** *Thanks be to God.*

**\*THE GOSPEL**

**Mark 6:6b-13**

**Bible p.915 (LP, NT p.49)**

**6** <sup>6b</sup>Then (Jesus) went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup> He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup> He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup>but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup> He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup> If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." <sup>12</sup> So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. <sup>13</sup> They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**People:** *Praise to you, Lord Christ.*

I'm going to come clean and tell you right at the start of this message this morning that -- when I came up with the title "We Got It Easy" -- I might have

spoken a little too hastily. But, let me walk you through how I got there; and then you and I will take another walk through our scriptures today and see where they lead us. Deal?

Okay. So, this is how that happened; how I got the title that sits in black ink on our bulletin this morning. First, I read the Epistle -- the letter that the good people of the church at Ephesus received this morning. And words like "humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity, grace -- as in God's grace, gifts -- as in our gifts" and I thought to myself, "Good lesson! We could all focus on these. We can all improve! Be more humble. More gentle. More patience. More loving. More united. After all, we are covered in extravagant grace by God -- and our extravagant God has given us gifts to boot!" "Not rocket science," I thought, "But a challenge nonetheless to reflect and grow." "There's our message!" I said to myself. After all, it's summer! It's hot in here! We've got boats to sail, beaches to sleep on. Or, on a rainy day like this -- screen porches to read in or couches to nap on. "Be a better you!" might have been another name for this sermon.

But it got the name, "We Got It Easy" after I went from reading the *letter*...to reading the *Gospel*.

The reading where Jesus sent them out two-by-two with a *stick*! Maybe you missed that. But I'm a long distance hiker. We weigh out everything. I didn't take a back up charger for my phone because it weighed 3 ounces. I didn't take a deodorant because it weighed 3 ounces. I didn't take a hair brush because I had a comb and a hat. So, I get the whole "go light" thing, but Jesus didn't just tell them to go light; he said to them "take nothing but that stick." No bread. No bag. No money. One layer of clothing. He told them to travel at the mercy of hospitality of strangers who are kind enough to invited you in. To stay only as long as they said you are welcome. And, if you are not welcome, to not even keep the dust of the town on your feet, but to shake it off.

And so they went -- just like that. With nothing but a stick. And they went telling people that they needed to "repent" -- which means -- they needed to turn around and head back into God's loving arms. And, along with the hard work of preaching, they did the hard labor of healing.

So -- if you can follow me here -- I considered what Jesus asked of his disciples -- *yikes!* -- and what Paul was asking of the good people of the

church of Ephesus and I thought like a church person and said, "*We got it easy!*" All we need to do is learn how to *play nice* with one another! We don't have to go through what Jesus made his first disciples go through: deprivation, relying solely on the kindness of strangers, trusting that God will open a way of care for us. We just need to *play nice* with one another. In short, "We got it easy!"

And, that is where I would have taken us this morning...if I hadn't seen two words -- two unexpected words -- which, as a writer, is usually the way God gets *my* attention.

In the letter to the Ephesians, the words we heard were, "I beg you to lead *a life worthy* of the calling to which you have been called"; but the Greek reads this way: "I beg you to *walk worthily*". To walk worthily of the calling to which you were called. And, my brain made a connection between the Letter to the Ephesians and the Gospel according to Mark.

The good people of the church at Ephesus were being told to walk worthily and so were the disciples who were sent off two by two by Jesus this morning. In my mind's eye, I saw the *disciples* walking worthily two by two. And then I saw the good church people walking worthily -- every single one of them -- to the calling to which they were called, and a question formed in my mind: *Which worthy walk are you being called to this morning?*

Let's consider first the worthy walk that the church at Ephesus was being called to. This is a call to reflection. It's asking you to look at yourself from the inside and the outside; to observe yourself and ask some questions -- some real, serious, challenging questions of how you are walking the walk that you've been called to. How humble are you? How gentle? How patient? How loving? How much effort are you putting toward unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

These are excellent questions! Aren't they? How easy it is to dismiss the...*gravity*...of this reflection. Where are you judging? We say we are walking the walk worthy of the walk of a follower of Christ, but that bar is high, and it's high for a reason. It isn't high to demoralize us. It isn't high to tell us we aren't good enough. It isn't high to show us what a failure we are to the world.

It's high for a different reason. It's high so that when we reach up to grab it as if it's low hanging fruit, we miss. That is, it's high enough to get our

attention. It wants us to consider if we're judging others. Come on, now. It's asking us some questions we might not want to entertain.

It's asking us to think about the last time we decided that someone just didn't measure up; that someone couldn't possibly know as much as I do; that someone else couldn't manage this ministry or that project as well as I can. It's wondering whether we had an unkind word for someone because they upset us or said something that made us have to evaluate how we were approaching a situation. It's asking us why? Why are we so invested in "our way"? Why? Why do we decide that someone else's way couldn't be good enough?

It's asking us to hear the letter to the Ephesians as if it was written to us...by someone who really loves us, who we'll listen to when we won't listen to many other people. In this spirit, hear these words again, "I therefore, beg you to lead life -- to worthily walk -- 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...Suddenly, I don't think we have it so easy.

This request, this appeal that this letter has for us this morning is a reset. It's asking us to hold ourselves to a higher standard. And it asks this of us because of the tremendous, unending, unshakable grace of God that has gifted each of us.

Is this the message that you need this morning? Hmmm...maybe we don't have it so easy. Because sometimes we are asked to look within at where we are thwarting God's grace in the world. Where we are dimming the light of Christ. Where people are missing the unconditional love of God because we have deflected it by our failure to be humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

So, if that's what's speaking to you this morning; maybe we don't have it so easy after all.

But, maybe -- just maybe -- that's not really calling to you this morning. *Maybe* -- just *maybe* -- this idea of Jesus' is intriguing you or tempting you or scaring the wits out of you.

Let me paint that picture for you once more. If you need to close your eyes, go ahead. Here's the picture: You've been in the company of your

teacher for months, maybe even a year or two or a bit more. One day, your teacher says, "it's time for you to fly the coop." And in that instance, gone are the days of wine from water. Food from a few loaves and fishes. Meals at the houses of your fellow disciples. Today, your teacher, your mentor, your rabbi, your guru -- says to you, "It's time for you to fly, Grasshopper. Today, you may leave with one of your fellow students and a staff -- a big stick -- to fight off wild animals and maybe defend yourself if you are attacked. But take no food. No extra clothes. Be totally vulnerable to everything. In short: Be totally reliant on God's provision through the generosity of strangers."

Ok. Now, if you have any control issues at all, you should be shaking right now. Okay; I'm shaking a little bit right now.

In this situation being presented to us this morning, we are being invited to trust deeper rather than to work harder.

This is usually the challenge for the overachiever. The ones among us that say, hey, I can work harder, faster, smarter and *make this work*. But sometimes, God is asking us to stop relying on our own strength. Sometimes God is asking us to trust more in *God* and less in ourselves.

Maybe, just maybe, today to walk worthily in your walk of faith, you are being asked to trust God more. To take a hop, skip, jump or even a leap of faith -- and see how God is there to catch you.

Both scriptures appeal to us to walk worthily. Depending on where you stand this morning, you are being invited to a different action or commitment. Do you need to look more deeply at yourself and see where you can grow richer in your faith through self reflection? Or are you being asked to look more urgently at yourself as to where you need to trust God more? They both lead to a more worthy walk. Which do you need today?

Throughout our lives, we will all pray the prayer of the psalmist we shared today. Do you remember it? Life is filled with complexities and challenges both in our personal realm and worldwide -- even universal! Everything from shootings to fires to earthquakes to wars to global warming. We eventually all get to a point of overwhelm and we cry out to God for help! And our souls wait for God more than those who watch for morning. And, just in case we missed the depth of the longing of our poet, he repeats himself, "more than those who watch for morning."

Today, more than ever, we are all holding on for dear life on a planet that seems to be spinning faster and faster with more hard, challenging or bad news. And, our faith journey, is asking of us to grow. To mature. To overcome. Our faith journey is offering us a way through. To successfully navigate the drama and the trauma and to triumph. And not just us to triumph, but for our triumph to be a light for others; to capture their attention, to cause their feet to walk worthily toward God instead of away; toward life instead of toward death; toward meaning instead of insignificance.

Perhaps until today you saw church as a Sunday thing that makes your week go better. But what if you saw church as a place where you matured in your faith so that heaven might actually touch earth? What if you saw church as a place where you got the courage to take leaps of faith in order to get out of your own way and open the door to a deeper relationship with God?

I changed the title of this sermon today from the impulsive, "We've Got It Easy" to "Walk Worthily". And, I invite you now to consider: will you do that today and in this moment, by a serious examination of how you behave in love? Or will you do that by taking a leap of faith?

I don't really think you can get this wrong. But do make a choice.

Blessings on the journey. Amen.