

## I. Intro.

### A. Last week Cindy invited us to join with Jesus on our own Emmaus Road journeys

1. She especially had us looking at the Emmaus Road story from Luke 24 through the lens of Christian formation.
2. She invited us to think about questions like ...
  - a) *Who influenced us to be the disciples we are? and*
  - b) *Are we being changed by walking with Jesus?*

### B. That last question is actually a nice lead-in to my message for today, although the link is not obvious at first

1. Today we're concluding this worship series in which we have retraced our steps from the last six years or so of spending several weeks at a time with certain Scriptures
2. In that series three years ago, our overarching question was "*What does it mean to be church?*" (we'll come back to that question)
3. Cindy's sermon last week focused on Christian formation, our own personal journeys of being formed and nurtured into the image of Christ
  - a) In a certain way, that's also what the book of Ephesians is about ...
  - b) It's about our growth in Christ, or in the words of 4:13, coming "to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."
4. But though we may tend to think of our own Emmaus Road journeys (our walks with Jesus) on a personal, individual basis, the letter of Ephesians was not primarily written for the edification of the individual disciple of Jesus.
  - a) This letter has the church in mind as its readers, and not merely individual Christians. ... It was written to the ancient church in Ephesus and probably also to other churches in the Roman province of Asia
  - b) So when you prayerfully read from the book of Ephesians, don't start by asking "What does this mean for *me*?" ... The opening question for application should be, "What does this mean for *us* in Christ's church?"

### C. In our series from three years ago, we preachers found very helpful a book about Ephesians called *Practice Resurrection*.

1. It's by Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*
2. Peterson proclaims that Ephesians is a book *for the church*, and a book about how God saves us and grows us into God's likeness *through the church*

## II. In 2010 we spent 11 rich weeks going through Ephesians ... how can I preach one sermon trying to summarize that?

**A. Simple answer: I can't**

1. But I can remind us and challenge us with the essence of its message
2. Book of Ephesians basically comes to us in two parts, evenly divided between first three chapters, and last three chapters

- a) Chapters 1-3 are largely theological teachings

Tell us who God is and what God has done for us through Christ

The first three chapters are not really about the church, but about God's glorious blessings, grace and reconciling love

- b) Chapters 4-6 build on this foundation, but go in a different direction. ... The second half of Ephesians is mostly ethical exhortations

Chapters 1-3	Chapters 4-6
Theological teaching <i>(Who God is &amp; what God has done through Christ)</i>	Ethical exhortation <i>(How we behave &amp; live out God's call in the church)</i>
About God's extravagant, glorious blessings, grace, & reconciling love	About us through the Holy Spirit, living "to the praise of his glory"

Here Paul tells us how we are to live out God's call in the church

If the first half is about what God has done, the second half is mostly about us, through the Holy Spirit, living "to the praise of his glory," partnering with God in this grand work

3. If you want to know the essence of what Ephesians is about, you can find it where these two halves meet

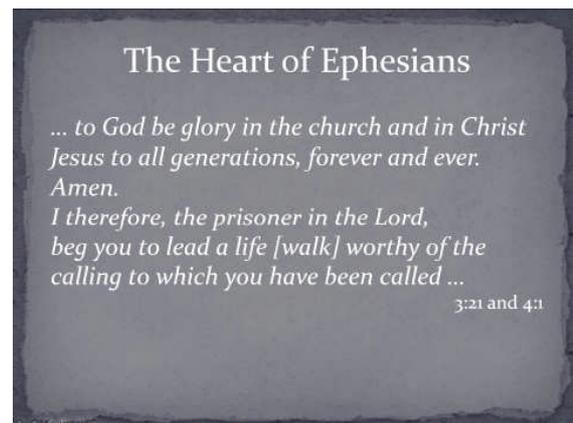
- a) I remember my English teachers telling me that a good essay will have a strong opening topic sentence that tells you what's coming

Letter to the Ephesians is summarized very well in these two verses but not at the beginning ...

they're in the very center of the letter

*(read them)* From God being glorified, the movement is directly to an appeal that we walk worthy of God's call to us

- b) Notice I just said the word "walk" but that word doesn't appear in most of our Bible translations



Most of our translations urge us to "lead a life" or "live a life" worthy of our calling

A more literal translation of this Greek epistle would tell us to "walk worthy of the calling" ...

So here you have two very important verbs that carry the weight of the message of Ephesians: calling and walking

c) Eugene Peterson says the power and beauty of the whole book is captured in those two verbs:

***God calls. We walk.***

The health of the church can be measured by how well we balance these two

The 2 halves of Ephesians	
Chapters 1-3	Chapters 4-6
Theological teaching <i>(Who God is &amp; what God has done through Christ)</i>	Ethical exhortation <i>(How we behave &amp; live out God's call in the church)</i>
About God's extravagant, glorious blessings, grace, & reconciling love	About us through the Holy Spirit, living "to the praise of his glory"
<b>God calls</b>	<b>We walk</b>

**B. "God calls. We walk." I like that.**

1. It reminds us of our place in the world.

- Before you and I ever took our first baby steps walking anywhere, God had already done the calling
- Whatever good things we may accomplish for Christ in this world, it doesn't start with us, it starts with God

2. I also appreciate this simple phrasing because it reminds us that, in the fast-paced 21<sup>st</sup> century, most of us don't actually live this way

- How many of you walked to church this morning? (hands?)*
- In today's world, we hardly walk anywhere.

Those of us who do walk regularly are probably walking for the sake of physical exercise, because we drive cars to get to our cushy jobs where we stand or sit in one room pretty much all day long

In biblical times, people walked everywhere. If you were lucky, you got to go by horse or donkey

c) In last week's Bible story, Jesus joined those two disciples on the road to Emmaus and they got there by ... **walking** ... not riding on anything

Bible scholars don't agree on where ancient Emmaus was, but it ranged from 7.5 miles from Jerusalem, to about 19 miles

If we choose the shorter distance, that's about as far as from here to Helen and Murray Bowman's house near Millersburg

(a) Bowmans, did you walk to church today?

(b) I admire the Bowmans for how often they ride bike to church at Waterford, but by biblical standards, they're

wimps! (*and if the Bowmans are wimps, you don't want to know what that makes the rest of us!*)

### 3. "God calls. We walk."

- a) If Ephesians were written according to our 21<sup>st</sup> century lifestyle, we would expect the message of the book today to be, "God texts. We drive." But that's not how it goes, is it?
- b) The eternal call of God through Jesus Christ on our lives may not come to us instantaneously so that it fits on a two-inch screen.
- c) And what we are called to do, as followers of the Lord Jesus, often demands a whole lot more time and energy than simply letting a 200 hp engine do the work for us.
- d) This week, I got off my duff once at lunch and walked along one of our wetlands trails for about half an hour ...

I literally heard the calling of the birds and noticed the rippling water from turtles sliding off their sun perches as I approached. Walking allowed me to take in these things.

If I had gone back there on a mountain bike or an ATV, I would have missed them. To stop walking and examine a flower is easier when you don't have to dismount or shut off an engine.

### 4. As you respond to God's great call on your life, are you "walking worthy of the calling"?

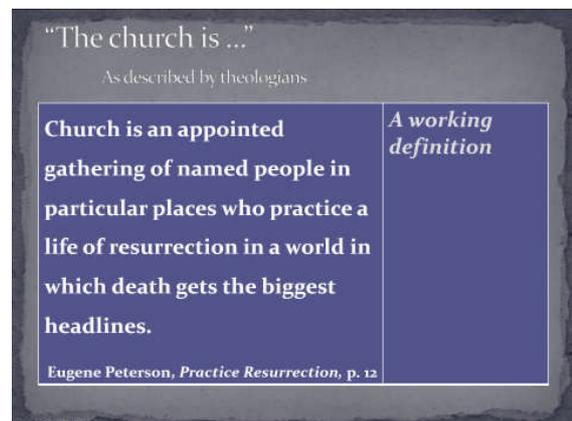
- a) Or does it feel more like you're hoping no one sees you texting while driving on your way to the third of five stops you have to make to juggle the multiple callings you hear from God, family, job, church, school, etc.?
- b) I recognize that our lives in today's world would feel irresponsible and exhausting if we literally walked most places instead of driving. That's not realistic.

### 5. But there is something timeless and compelling for us about the image of "walking worthy of the calling" rather than simply "living a worthy life"

## III. So as we consider what it means to "walk worthy of the calling," I want to return to initial question, "What does it mean to be church?"

### A. I won't give just one answer, because there are multiple ...

1. Eugene Peterson provided one helpful definition in rather ordinary language:
2. Since we're so used to thinking of church in terms of how we Christians organize it and do it, here's a definition that might make you think twice. In



Text: Ephesians 3:14 – 4:6

(Dwelling in the Word – Déjà vu ) 5

light of those two halves of book of Ephesians, summarized by "God calls. We walk." try this on:

3. But ultimately I'm less interested in how theologians define the church

### **B. What matters more is how we the people of Waterford define it and especially how we live it out**

1. You might recall that three years ago we placed a bulletin board in the foyer that had newsprint on both sides of it. Each side simply had the words, "The church is ..."

2. Then over several weeks we invited people of all ages to write or draw how they wanted to complete that sentence. (*I have list of what people wrote ... ask me if you'd like a copy*)

3. As you already heard, I invite you today to do the same exercise on the insert in your bulletin, as a way of reflecting how you would briefly describe what church means

4. We won't be collecting these, although I'm happy to receive yours if you want to share it

## **IV. So "God calls and we walk" ... sounds simple doesn't it? It's not, especially when real live churches are involved**

### **A. We Americans used to think of ourselves as a "Christian nation," when almost everyone we knew went to church, or at least grew up going to church**

1. I don't use that phrase "Christian nation" because I don't believe such a thing exists unless you compromise that word "Christian"

2. But considering all the people who've ever heard the good news of Jesus in some form, you'd think our society would have lots of growing churches, filled with people wanting a faith community.

### **B. In fact we know that hasn't been true for decades**

1. Church attendance on the whole is declining and the numbers are growing of people who identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious" ... this may even include some of you who are ambivalent about connecting with a church at all



2. If you somehow could welcome back all the unchurched people in the Goshen community who were ever disappointed or wounded by a church, I bet all the church sanctuaries in this city couldn't accommodate the overflow crowds!

3. Last month one of our Beninese guests was describing the challenges that face churches in Benin, just as we have challenges: He said, "Wherever you have people, you have problems."

### C. What I'm getting at here is that the Ephesian church being addressed here is not a model of a perfect church

1. We know from other places in the New Testament that the real congregation in ancient Ephesus had plenty of their own problems

2. Although there is language in the Bible calling us to be "holy and blameless," in today's world, churches can in fact be deeply stained and feel very *unholy*

a) There is no ideal church, free of hypocrisy or self-serving behavior

b) You will be disappointed if you expect a "perfect fit" for you at Waterford, but you'll be disappointed anywhere else, too

c) So here's one more little gem of a definition of church I found from Eugene Peterson:

3. Behind that seemingly simple message of "God calls. We walk," is a very complex spiritual reality:

*a) The kingdom of God keeps on advancing despite such an imperfect collection of sinners and saints that we call the church.*

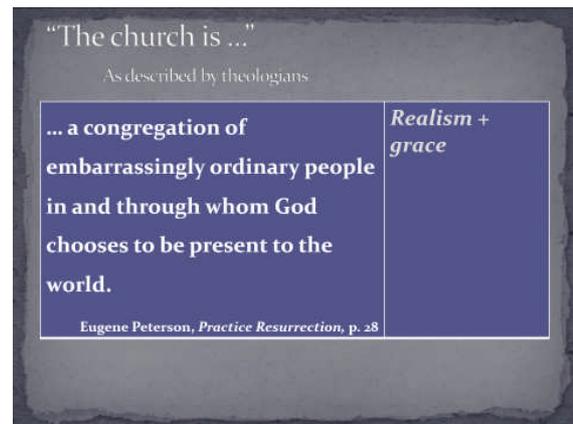
*b) In fact, God's kingdom advances even through the imperfect church! (Halleluia!)*

4. Despite how self-absorbed and often misguided the church appears, I do not find any other movements or institutions that have accomplished more for the gospel of Jesus in history than Christ's church

a) I understand that some people today want nothing to do with organized Christianity because of their past experiences with Christians and with churches

b) But there are many different forms and models of being church, and one style or size does not work for all people

c) As believers and disciples of Jesus Christ, I firmly believe that God did create us for community!



If you want to grow in your faith as a follower of Jesus Christ, you will not last long trying it on your own.

Every believer needs to seek out and join with other believers for their mutual growth in Christ

## V. Conclusion

### **A. Brothers and sisters, in the book of Ephesians God calls us to some amazing and grand things:**

1. We're called to “live for the praise of his glory” ... to make known God's wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places ...
2. to know the unknowable love of Christ, and to be filled with all the fullness of God!

### **B. We're also empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out that calling through the blessed and blemished instrument of the church**

1. God wants us to walk with humility, gentleness and patience ... to equip the saints for ministry ...
2. To bear with one another in love ... to speak the truth in love ... and to live in household relationships of mutual submission where Christ is the model for loving

### **C. As imperfect as we are in the church, let us be vessels of God's grace and love by walking worthy of this high calling, through the power of the One able to accomplish abundantly more than all we can ask or imagine!**

As we have throughout this series, we acknowledge that God's word comes through many voices and not just one ... so we invite you to share your reflections from Ephesians, from this worship service, or what you believe the church is ...