

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship
Anita Rediger
August 2, 2009
Ephesians 4:1-16

The Bond (of Peace)

Opening – President, Policeman and Professor

Imagine the first conversations between Jewish and Gentile believers of Paul's day as they came into contact with one another. How difficult it must have been for them to see beyond the stereotypical assumptions which they had acquired through culture's many explicit and implicit teachings! So many differences...so much history...such different vantage points! It was a seemingly impossible...and improbable thing to consider – these two people groups becoming one. Like cables forbidding entrance to a foreclosed property...the chains of superiority and prejudice were tightly linked; the bonds of intolerance too strong to break. What new story would allow them to view one another in fresh, welcoming ways? What new story would offer ways filled with possibility instead of peril, surprise instead of suspicion.

Over the past couple of weeks, we've seen two persons, of our day, face-to-face with each other and their differing vantage points, from their respective cultural "places." The misunderstandings – on all sides- in the arrest of Harvard professor, Henry Gates by Cambridge policeman James Crowley reveal what Jim Wallis describes as persons being "Trapped in the Script."

Wallis writes, I remember listening to the African-American mother of a friend of mine growing up in Detroit, who told her children to hide from the police if they ever were lost, while my mother told us kids to look for a policeman if we were far away from home. That is the context of this story for every black American, especially of Gates' generation. Gates being arrested on his front porch after a report of breaking into his own home seems both incredulous and, at the same time, not surprising to most black people in America.

And that is the script of this racial drama being played out about the professor and the police officer. What most strikes me about the story is how neither participant was able to get out of the script of the sad story of the relationship between black people and white police in America. SoJoMail 07.30.09

Perhaps you feel like you've already heard enough about this news story, yet I think it is a very real scenario for us to test alongside of the letter to the Ephesians. Two weeks ago, we read the celebratory words of Paul as he exclaimed that through the "*incomparable riches of grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ and through the glorious riches of his Spirit,*" the hostilities between Jews and Gentiles were resolved and the walls of division dismantled. If the hostilities between people truly are resolved why the continued repetition of violence toward another – especially violence which is ignited by outward appearance and role? The first three chapters of Ephesians have impressed us with *proclamation of faith through praise*. The next chapters will challenge us with *proclamation of faith through practice*. "Therefore..."

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship
Anita Rediger
August 2, 2009
Ephesians 4:1-16

Reflections on the text

Once again we are greeted by Paul introducing himself as “Prisoner Paul.” In last week’s reading of chapter 3 we heard that Paul was a prisoner “*for* Christ Jesus.” In contrast, Chapter 4 begins by Paul introducing himself as a prisoner “*in* the Lord.” My thoughts on this subtle, but important nuance: Paul, “a prisoner *for* Christ Jesus,” that is – he is not a prisoner of anyone else, but Jesus– even though physically imprisoned! Take that -Roman captors, frightened and threatened religious leaders! In other words, Paul recognizes that he is bound and to whom – and that is Jesus- not by any other power!

In contrast, today’s introduction of Paul as “prisoner *in* the Lord” causes me to think of Paul and the parameters of this binding relationship. He is captive to God – a Spirit found in *all* ways and in *all* places. Paul recognizes that wherever he is, however he is, that he is bound, totally, to the One who is “above all, through all and in all.” God – present in every place, present in every circumstance of life.

From this place of knowing, this place of being “rooted and grounded in love” Paul implores the early Christ followers, “I *beg* you to live (walk in) a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” When was the last time that you begged someone to do something? or begged them *not* to do something? I had to really think about that. I’m not sure that I’ve come up with an exact situation, but I do have the sense of great intensity when I hear the word, “beg.” Begging seems to me to be much more than a whispered hint or under-the-breath suggestion. Walking in the way fitting of “the calling to which we’ve been called” must be important. The stakes of not living a life worthy of this calling must be very high!

So what is this calling? Our calling is to share what Paul describes as the mystery of Christ: a recognition and openness to the gift of grace to all persons, a gift for all peoples – for all times; in all times. Our calling is to celebrate life as one body...*The Body of God. (Sallie McFague)*

Now comes the hard part...Paul continues to describe what this “walk” looks like! Live with one another – even those outside of your comfort zone – “with *all* (yikes) 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*.” Aha! Another bond...yet this bond - one that belongs to being a prisoner for and in Christ Jesus. The bond of peace- the bond which links us to the one hope of our calling, to our one Lord, our one faith, our one baptism, our one God and Father of all...” A bond that is [woven] above all and through all and in all.” Even when the foundations of the Roman prison shook and the chains and stocks fell open, Paul and Silas remained prisoners of Christ – held in this bond, the bond of peace. It is being prisoners “for” and “in” Christ which make such a walk possible at all.

Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship

Anita Rediger

August 2, 2009

Ephesians 4:1-16

(Reflections/wonderments on what “living a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called” in our present circumstances, our community life.)

“The unity of the church is destroyed not by differences in what we believe, but by differences in how we feel about each other. It is the spirit that gives us unity – thus the unity of the church is a “given’ that is already there---- we are not called to create unity in church – we are given severe warning about not destroying the unity which is given by the Spirit.

So if we want to strengthen the unity – I don’t start by asking what your nationality is , or wondering what you’ll do to me because of the color of your skin or the accent of your speech. I start by asking you about your life experiences, your faith journey. We come face-to-face with our “scripts” of the past. On this walk a new story begins to emerge. We discover that gifts have been given *to each of us for the building up of the body of Christ*. By speaking the truth in love – that is the truth of God’s grace given for all persons – we find ourselves growing, no longer vulnerable to fear mongering and scare tactics, rather we find ourselves a *whole* body...building itself up in love!

For this reason!!! Paul *implores us, begs us*, to walk in this way. Because when we are uncharitable, or unforgiving; selfish or impatient.– the unity given by the Spirit is fractured. It is then that the bonds of peace are shattered...and then we become **real prisoners – prisoners of our fears, our greed, prisoners of our violence toward each other**. Brothers and sisters – instead, may “we take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love! *The Message* 4:15-16

Ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est...Where true love and charity are found, God is always there.

Interlude from STJ #39