

Sunday, August 4, 2024  
*Ecclesiastes 12:13; Ephesians 4:1-7 "A Worthy Life"*

We all start out wanting to make something useful and special of our lives.

The obituary of Edna O'Brien, an Irish writer who died last week at age 93, quotes the despair of a character in poverty, in a hard marriage, in her novel, ([House of Splendid Isolation](#), 1994). "...in spite of it all there used to be inside me this river, an expectation for something marvelous. When did I lose it? When did it go? I want before I die to be myself again." (NYT, by Anthony DePalma, July 28, 2024)

Is this world that way that God likes things? Or is this a world that people who thought they could work things out better than God developed?

Each of us trying to live a worthy life have to decide what use of our time, our body, our talents and training, our experiences, would be worth our life.

Paul writes that he is in prison several times throughout the letter. He may have been in Ephesus between 60-62 AD, or he may have been writing from imprisonment in Rome (*Acts 28*). Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of our text for the day starts out this way, "In light of all this, here's what I want you to do. While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk—better yet—run—on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands, I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere."

The Letter to the Ephesians shares almost all content and 55 verses with the Letter to the Colossians. The name of Ephesus is not mentioned as the destination in the text of the letter and may have been a circular letter that was copied and sent from one church on to another. Paul spent 3 months in Ephesus (*Acts 18:19-21*) and then later more than 2 years there (*Acts 20*), with co-workers like Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila stepping in with leadership, and lots of close Christian associates, but there are no personal notes in the letter, encouraging some people to think of it as a circular letter to all the churches of the area.

The first three chapters of the letter teach the sweeping world view of Christian faith, sketching great and eternal truth in Jesus Christ for the Church. From chapter 4, where we begin, Paul zooms in to each member's holy life and the practical workings of unity for each congregation. Some people see the emphasis on unity as instructing new believers who were Jewish to continue to see themselves as part of God's covenant people and not separate themselves.

All this talk of cooperation and unity is not to say that Christians must all be the same. The idea is that each person is given by Christ their special gifts and their special part of the community life. (*Eph 4:7*)

All this talk of cooperation and unity is disturbing to some people who find that competition sharpens their mind and work. A lot of men and boys don't like school classrooms or churches, where talking and writing about your goals and experiences are valued over decisive action.

The qualities mentioned can seem squishy. Humility rather than pride; gentleness rather than aggression; patience and tolerance rather than sharp judgment. Can eagerness to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bonds of peace really be a successful life strategy? Seeing everyone as valuable and necessary for the community takes the fun out of insisting on our own way. Can there really be a calling that God has given each of us in Christ that makes the lives of men and of women worthwhile?

General society talks about unity, but that harmony is based on the powerful dominating the weak. Getting things done is associated with "disharmony, discord, and disunity" (Barclay, *Ephesians and Colossians*, p.157) driven by as much as you are able to advance your own goals.

The church is not made one Body and one Spirit for the purpose of being a religious society. Remember that religious ceremonies and religious identity are not eternal, but are temporary. Christ's work in His life, death and resurrection were for the purpose of moving us from shame and guilt to freedom and unity with all God is doing in the world. We can't talk ourselves out of being faithful and good as described in our text for the sake of accomplishing some great work in the world. There is no worthy goal that will take us away from the unity of the one Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of us all who is over all, above all, through all, and in all.

We can't separate our religious lives on Sundays and other days with our Christian friends from our "real lives" of earning a living and having goals and dreams. Even though, and especially when, the real world and trying to earn a living in the real world seem to be completely at odds with talk of calling or faith, there is nothing outside God's purposes of good for the world.

The Bible is very clear that our own efforts are not going to bring the Kingdom of God on earth, not going to establish final justice and peace. We are always working for clear air and fair distribution of food, and justice and education, but everything we accomplish is limited and continues to slip and slide into disorder. So it is not the accomplishments we achieve, much less the prizes we win, which make our life worthwhile. It is the calling God has given us, and the life we live with God and our neighbor that make our life worthwhile.