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## Proper 13 • Ephesians 4:1–16 • August 2, 2015

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Paul has regaled the Ephesians with rich spiritual blessings they have in Christ (Eph 1), how both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace alone through faith alone (Eph 2), how the mystery of the gospel has been revealed by the Spirit through the very human apostles and prophets; Paul then prays for spiritual strength for the Christians in Ephesus (Eph 3). Pastors may have already preached on these three themes in the prior Sundays.

Paul then does a paraenetic shift with “therefore” in 4:1. Paul “urges” (parakalw) them to walk in a manner worthy of their calling in Christ. He enumerates characteristics (elsewhere called fruit of the Spirit) like humility, gentleness, love, patience and peace. Then he focuses on unity, using the word *one* eight times in verses 4–7. Even the apostles, prophets, and the pastoral office were given for the building up of the unity of this one body, the church (vv. 11–16).

LCMS Lutherans often have a struggle with unity, both within congregations and synodically. Our old Adam desires to do his own thing, strengthened by the individualistic American culture we inhabit. This text helps us to see the importance of the unity of Christ’s body, the church, and the importance of differing gifts, even when we too often seek uniformity over unity.

### Sermon Suggestion

I want you to look at your hand. Front, back, each finger, nails, lines, whatever. Consider your hand. What do you like about it? What don’t you like about it? Are there any particular strengths or skills that your hand has? What does it enable you to do? Are there any particular ways that your hand has been difficult or painful to you?

I want you to look at your knee. For many of you it is covered, so you’ll have to remember what it looks like under the clothing. But think about your knee. What do

you like about it? What don't you like about it? Are there any particular strengths that your knee has? What does it enable you to do? Are there any particular ways that your knee has been difficult or painful to you?

Consider both your hand and your knee. How do they benefit you? What would your life be like if you did *not* have your hand? Your knee? Both hands? Both knees? Both your hands and your knees are gifts to you, gifts from God. Sometimes they may be painful to you. Sometimes they may not do what you want them to, what you expect them to. But they are yours and you are much better off with them than without them. They are yours; parts of you unified as one body.

Now, look around the sanctuary, not at the walls, but at the people, not at their hands or knees, but at them. As you look around, ask yourself what particular strengths you see among the people here? What do you like about them? Consider these people around you. They, like your hands and your knees, are a part of you. You are a part of them. We are all parts of the body of Christ. He is our head. Just as your hands and your knees are gifts to you, gifts from God, so are the people around you gifts from God. They may at times be very pleasant gifts from God. At other times, like your hands or your knees or other body parts, they may be difficult or painful to you. Like your hands or your knees, they may not always do what you want them to. But, you know what? They are still part of you. Just like your hands and your knees, you are much better off with them than without them. They enable Christ to accomplish things that you could not do without them. They are yours, you are theirs, parts unified and growing together as one body, the body of Christ, the church.

This, basically, is the message that Paul has for the Ephesians here in our epistle text. He has just spent three chapters captivating them with the marvels that Christ has done for them, many of which we have read over the past three weeks in the epistle lessons. He has proclaimed to them that Christ has predestined them to be his, and comforts them with that thought. Christ has saved them by his gracious intervention on the cross and by his glorious resurrection. He is risen. He has made them alive when they were dead.

Another idea: Cameroon pastor and Concordia Seminary graduate student Jean Baptiste Mberebe found this quote about the African self-understanding of personality: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."<sup>1</sup> This stands in sharp contrast with our Western, Cartesian individualism: "I think, therefore I am."

Rick Marrs

<sup>1</sup> Tapiwa Mucherera, *Pastoral Care from a Third World Perspective* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 55.