

Sermon August 2, 2015 “Equipped, Fed and Led” Ephesians 4:1-16 John 6:22-35

To help us understand a bit better the reading from Paul’s letter to the Christian community in Ephesus, I share commentary offered by William Willimon: “Ephesians is an epistle addressed to a congregation or congregations where Jews and Christians, formerly arch enemies, have been brought together by their belief in Jesus Christ. Ephesians seems to be aimed at Gentile Christians, who seemed to be lording it over Jewish Christians.” (*Pulpit Resource*, vol. 43, No. 3, p. 21) In the letter, Paul challenged them all to remember that in Christ there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:5-6)

They kept forgetting this back then; indeed, throughout our history Christians have too often been more willing to break apart from one another because of doctrinal disagreements or to spew hatred at those of other faiths than we have to share our faith that we are all children of God, and that God has, through Christ Jesus, called us to love one another and to love others as well. It’s so easy to forget what Jesus has called us to do!!

It is said that Martin Luther, in some of his bouts with the devil, when he felt himself sinking into depression, found it helpful to touch his forehead, on which the sign of the cross had been made at his baptism, and to say (he did it in Latin) “I am baptized.” Remembrance of his baptism recalled for Luther God’s ownership of him, and this provided him comfort in times of distress. It grounded him and led him and fed him.

Fred B Craddock, renowned preacher and seminary professor (Candler Theological Seminary, Emory U), told of a visit he made several years ago to see a member of his church before her surgery. “The woman had never been in the hospital before, and the surgery was major. I walked in there. She was a nervous wreck, and she started crying. She wanted me to pray with her, which I did. By her bed there was a stack of books and magazines: *True Love, Mirror, Hollywood Today*, stuff about Elizabeth Taylor and others. She had a stack of them there, and she was a wreck. It occurred to me, *There’s not a calorie in that whole stack to help her through her experience!* She had no place to dip down into a reservoir and come up with something – a word, a phrase, a thought, an idea, a memory, a person. Just empty.” *Craddock Stories*, p. 30.

And Jesus said to those folks who tracked him down that day hoping to see more miracles, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you...I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:27, 35)

During my vacation, I was blessed to have ample opportunity to do a lot of walking in San Francisco, in Washington, D.C., and in parks in Connecticut. As we walked, I was saddened to see a lot of litter in all three locations. Judging by what was discarded, there’s a lot of junk food being consumed, and there are a lot of people who simply don’t seem to care whether they

respect the environment or not.

When it comes to God, even those of us who firmly believe in our Christian faith can get off track and buy into stuff that does not feed our souls or lead us to use the gifts we have been given to help others come to believe that in Jesus Christ, we are known, loved, forgiven, and tended to by the God who gave us life in the first place. That's why coming to church is important.

Here's a brief story, again from Fred Craddock: "A young woman said to me, during the second semester of her freshman year of college, 'I was a failure in my classes; I wasn't having any dates; and I didn't have as much money as the other students. I was just so lonely and depressed and homesick and not succeeding. One Sunday afternoon, I went to the river near the campus. I climbed up on the rail and was looking into the dark water below. For some reason, I thought of the line, "Cast all your cares upon him, for he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) I stepped down, and here I am.' I said, 'Where did you learn that line?' The young woman replied, 'I don't know.' I asked, 'Do you go to church?' 'No...Well, when I visited my grandmother in the summers we went to Sunday school and church.' I said, 'Ah...'" *Craddock Stories*, p. 33 (edited by fte) Morsels of food, a lifeline of hope, and a life is saved.

So we remind ourselves, "I am baptized," I am called to follow Jesus, to remember what he has asked me to do, love God, love others, move through my life asking him to show me HIS path for me, that I may properly imagine what *Jesus* would do in any particular situation or time.

This sermon today will end with one more story from preacher Craddock. I shared this with an early Bible study group here three summers ago. I hope we can all have our souls fed through it today. *A family is out for a drive on a Sunday afternoon. It is a pleasant afternoon, and they relax at a leisurely pace down the highway. Suddenly, the two children begin to beat their father on the back: "Daddy, Daddy! Stop the car! There's a kitten back there on the side of the road!" The father protests, "We can't stop; we're having a drive. Besides, we don't have room for another animal; we have a zoo already at the house."*

*"But Daddy, it will die! Are you going to just let it die??!!"*

*Finally, the father turns the car around, returns to the spot, and pulls off to the side of the road. "You kids stay in the car. I'll see about it." He goes out to pick up the little kitten, who is just skin and bones, sore-eyed, and full of fleas. When he reaches down to pick it up, with its last bit of energy the little kitten bristles, baring tooth and claw. HISS!! He picks up the kitten by the loose skin at the neck, brings it over to the car, and says, "Don't touch it. It's probably got leprosy."*

*Back home they go, where the children give the kitten several baths, about a gallon of warm milk, and beg their parents: "Can we let it stay in the house just tonight? Tomorrow we'll fix a place for it in the garage..." Reluctantly, the father allows it.*

*Several weeks pass. One day the father walks in, feels something rub against his leg, and there is the cat. He reaches down toward the cat, carefully checking to see that no one is watching. When the cat sees his hand, it does not bare its claws or hiss; instead, it arches its back to receive a caress. Can this be the same cat? It's not the same as that frightened, hurt, starving, hissing kitten on the side of the road. Of course not, and you know as well as I do what makes the difference.*

*(Craddock continues:) Not too long ago God reached out a hand to bless me and my family. When God's hand reached out to me, I looked at that hand; it was covered with scratches. Such is the hand of love, extended to all who hunger and thirst for life. (Somewhat altered by fte, from *Craddock Stories*, pp. 24-25)*

In Jesus, God offers us his hand and a life where we are known, loved, sheltered, fed, cherished forgiven and guided. In Christ, we are invited to be part of the family: One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all." (Eph 4:5-6)

May all peoples throughout this world have their eyes opened to Jesus Christ because of our love: our love for God, our love for one another, and our commitment to love our neighbors as we do our best to follow the Bread of Life, Jesus! Amen.

(Hymn - "They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love")