

Sermon Ephesians 4:1-13

Theme- UNITED WE GO

We welcome you to South Africa the birth land of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela who would be 100 years old today. And in a special way we welcome you to South Africa Annual Conference, one of the three annual conferences within Mozambique Episcopal Area.

Nelson Mandela once said " When I am with energetic young people I feel like the batteries are recharged," and this is the way I feel as I am here in this gathering of energetic UMC young people. My batteries are being recharged, and so I thank God for this opportunity.

When Tyler sent me an email with the theme of this gathering, I said to myself, "the young people have gotten a theme that is relevant today to the world in general and to our denomination in particular."

It is a theme that shows an existing movement of going. In fact it is a response to Jesus command in Matthew 28, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations," and it also shows the way these persons are to move for better results - UNITED.

The world in which we live has long discovered that there is strength when people are united, and at the same time discovered that there is weakness when people are divided. That is why we have sayings such as "united we stand, divided we fall" or the African proverb that says "If you want to go fast go alone. If you want to go far go together."

Sisters and brothers, as we read the scriptures throughout the Old and New Testaments we find that they testify the strength of unity and the weakness of division in families, in groups of people and in nations. The famous story of humans building the tower of Babel in the Old Testament is a clear example of the strength of unity where God is openly saying "because the people are united there is nothing

they cannot do.” (Genesis 11) In other words ,God was saying that these people could do the impossible because they were united, so there is strength in being united

In the New Testament, in the gospel according to Mark (3:24-26), Jesus talks of the weakness of division saying “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end”

The passage we have heard from the book of Ephesians 4 is a letter from the apostle Paul to the congregation at Ephesus, where he calls upon that congregation to be “united in the Spirit” as they move in their journey of faith.

I want to take you back a little bit to what comes before, at least in chapters 1 to 3, for us to understand well what Paul is saying here.

In these first chapters, he says to the readers of the letter that they were chosen to be daughters and sons of God through Christ who died for all of us without discrimination, and that through the blood of Christ we have been redeemed. Paul explains that we have a gracious God that by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross. We are all brought near God as adopted children. He goes further, explaining that through Christ we become members of the body of Christ and Christ is the head of this body which is the church.

A special prayer from Paul follows, asking God that Christ should reside in us, specifically in our hearts, so that we understand how much Christ loves us. This Christ, who can do more than we ask

Then comes our text in verse 1 where Paul urges the members to live according to the call they received. This calling is key, as we live as members of the body. It shows that we are not here by accident, we

are not here as second citizens in the Kingdom of God. We are here because each one of us has been called.

Young people, I invite you to look at the person at your right side, then look at the person at your left side. That person you have just looked at is very important for God and for the church and that is why she or he is here. You also are important, so all of you that are part of the church and are equally important, no matter where you are coming from, no matter your economic status, no matter whose son or daughter you are. One thing is true, you are an important part of the body of Christ. If we look at the book of Isaiah, in chapter 43 it speaks of being “called by name,” so you are not in the church by mistake. In fact you are not here in this gathering by accident, you were called to fulfil a mission, so it is important as we discuss the issues before us, as we make decisions on the issues, we need to know that they are important for the church as a whole.

Paul says that because of this calling, because we are now children of God, there are expectations on our walking. We have been changed inwardly as we came into this relationship. All of us that have been called are to be part of creating an environment where there is humility, and not pride, where there is gentleness, and where we treat each other with love.

Paul further gives us a special responsibility of keeping the unity of the Spirit. This unity is so essential in the Bible in general that records Jesus praying that we as a body of Christ be united. Paul deals with this theme of unity in several of his writings. We find it in Romans, in Corinthians, in Timothy, etc.

Paul was fully aware that there were diverse people in the church at Ephesus. In fact, these members were enemies before coming together, and amongst them there were those that were considered to be far off from God, and those that were near. BUT, he argues that in Christ they had become one, guided by the Word of God. So

Paul's intense teachings in his writings have the objective of strengthening the faith of the members on the truth of the gospel.

As children of God one of our responsibilities is to maintain "unity of the Spirit", most scholars agree, and it is true, that this unity has been created by God in Jesus Christ, and offered to us as the body of Christ. Ours is to create an environment where it continues in our midst.

I want to call attention again to the African Proverb that "if you want to go fast go alone, and if you want to go far go together." I am sure all of us want to go far, all of us want to see the church move forward, we want to see more people being saved but to do so we need the guidance of this Holy Spirit who can keep us united. There is power in going together. So united we go, but we do not go empty handed.

As people that have been called by Christ, he blesses each one of us with special gifts to build his church. So young people, know that each one of you has something good to contribute, there no one who is nobody here and so offer us that gift

Christ blesses us also with the gifts of leaders in different capacities to equip each one of us for the ministry of the church. As we are equipped, we also grow into maturity as a church.

It is through the Spirit that you, and you, and you, and I are integral part of this body called Church. Let each one of you give his/her contribution, so that we move together as a church of Christ. What will come from this gathering is important for the development of the whole church, today and tomorrow.

United we go.

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