

## “Are We Willing to be Beseached?”

(Ephesians 4: 1-16)

On Wednesday this past week, with nary a cloud in the sky and the usual July humidity non-existent, I decided it was a good time to practice what I preach and make good on my promise to be a better steward of the environment, leave a smaller footprint on creation by actually riding my bicycle to church. Now, it turns out that a scant four mile bike trip from my front door to church can actually be a pretty profound learning experience. For instance, I learned if you want to increase your prayer life, try riding your bike down the steep incline of Milwaukee Street as cars zoom past. This is also good for making your prayers to God more concise as I believe my refrain was just a simple, “please God” repeated over and over and over again. I learned that there are muscles in my backside that had heretofore been complacent but at around two o’clock on Wednesday afternoon were insistent that I realize how unhappy they were with my decision. I learned that there are some very considerate folks out there, one car that actually backed up so I could cross the street. I learned to be more aware of my surroundings. This goes not only for cars backing up from driveways that, unless I wanted to spend my vacation in a full body cast, I was wise to watch out for; but I was also able to notice the warmth of the sunshine, the various smells in the air, especially as I passed by the fairgrounds, the sound of birds and even a small robin that landed a few feet in front of me. I learned that there is an indescribable sense of the sacred that comes with feeling the wind baptize your face and this holy feeling of life coursing through my body as I exerted the energy needed to propel the bike forward. Friends, all of that in one twenty minute ride to work.

To be sure, we are constantly learning new things throughout our life, each and every day. Sometimes the new insight has all the grace of an eighteen wheeler whooshing past us. There are new ideas that have a forcefulness that will not be ignored and must be paid attention in that very instant we come in contact. We are stopped in our tracks, speechless. Gina, Ethan, and Olivia frequently have that kind of impact in my life. About once a day one of these people whom I love so much will say something to me, and the combination of words or their actions will make me realize how much I have left to learn. But there are also other ideas that can sit subtly in our subconscious patiently waiting for us to get around to noticing them. I usually find this is true with books I read. I will find myself at a meeting and all of a sudden from some recess of my mind there are ideas or words that I had encountered weeks **or months** ago that decide it is finally time to make their presence known. Part of what we affirm as people of faith is that there is always more ‘light and truth breaking forth from God,’ to paraphrase John Robinson’s words to the Pilgrims as they set out on their journey across the Atlantic. Faith, we claim, is a journey that is never **quite** complete, where we are never **quite** finished. Our faith is a journey where we can never fully exhaust all the mystery, peace, grace, hope, love and new life of our relationship with God, with each other, and with creation.

Paul offers us this morning a vision for how we might live into this life of constant learning and discovering and sharing of our faith together. The passage begins with Paul, and I love the King James word, **beseaching** the Ephesians. We in the UCC don’t do a whole lot of beseaching, it is not really the sort of soft verbiage like ‘encourage’ or ‘invite’ or ‘prayerfully consider’ that we tend to gravitate toward. But, perhaps, as people of faith we could use a little beseaching, especially since what Paul beseaches and begs and appeals

for the Ephesians to live into is a life of humility, gentleness, patience and love. You see, on the journey of faith, when we are not always sure where we are going, when we might know what and where point A is, but are unclear as to what or where point B is exactly, we need to share humility, gentleness, patience, and love with each other. Pause for a moment and let's play with a metaphor from our individual lives that might help us understand why what Paul is suggesting is so important for us to practice **at all times**. Let's say hypothetically you are traveling in the car with the person you covenanted to be with for better or for worse. And hypothetically, you are right in the middle of "for worse" because you are lost, you don't know which road you are on because your navigator, your co-pilot in life was not reading and watching the map. And the tension rises in the car and all of Paul's beseeching about humility, gentleness, patience, and love gets tossed right out the window on to the side of this unknown road.

You see, friends, Paul's vision for the church and call for us as faithful individuals seeking to live together was that we had to practice humility, gentleness, patience and love at **all** points in the journey, especially in times when laughter is easy and the joy is contagious. Because, when we get lost, when we come to a fork in the woods and some want to go down the well worn path and others are quoting Frost about the 'road less traveled,' if we have not practiced patience, if love has not already been woven into our DNA, if we don't naturally seek to be gentle with each other, it is going to be difficult at that point in the journey to start living out Paul's vision. Paul's call to practice this way of relating to each other applies to **all times and with all people!**

Part of the sacredness woven into the practices of humility, gentleness, patience and love is that Paul did not just create these ethics from thin air but these ideas and values originated in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Micah chapter 6 people learned that answer to the question of what God requires is to 'do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.' In Isaiah chapter 57 God proclaims that God dwells in 'high and holy places, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite.' If our ethic is one of humility, gentleness, patience, and love; then perhaps we would be wise to create, cultivate, and carve out time when we can gather and practice this way of **being** in community with each other. And that is where the insert in your bulletin this morning comes in. What is listed there is the prayerful vision for learning together as a community of faith for this year. There are series that last several weeks and single day events for a couple of hours; there are moments of playing together and times of conversation. The opportunities seek to cover a wide gamut of ways to connect with the sacred. Here is what I am prayerfully asking, maybe even beseeching you to consider. First, because I believe adult education is vital, because I believe our faith longs to deepen and grow, and because I believe it is not enough for us as adults just to talk about education but we are called to model for all the children in this church the Christian life, I would like everyone to participate in at least one event. So, read over the opportunities paying attention to where you feel your soul stirs in response. Consider where is it that your heart leaps with enthusiasm? The second step is to fill out the sheet as a covenant and drop it in the offering plate this morning or past the church office in the coming weeks.

I pray that as a church we will find ways to connect and grow. I pray we will have moments when we can gather and we are able to practice humility, gentleness, patience, and love with/for each other. I pray as we come together we will discover a grace and the presence of the One who calls us and even beseeches us into a life-giving and life changing

relationship. I pray as we journey together in the months and year to come there will be moments of new insights, sharing ideas, learning and growing and that this will not be as isolated individuals, but all of us together as the church.

May it be so for you and for me and for all of us together. Thanks be to God and let the people of God say, "Amen"