

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

October 7, 2018

Ephesians 4:1-16

“YOU BEFORE ME”--THE GLUE THAT KEEPS US TOGETHER

So, were you the kid who always had to be first, and you had the personality to get your way? And are you, deep down, still that kid? “Me first!” How well is that workin’ for you?

Or were you the kid who always thought YOU were right—smug arrogance. You didn’t have the personality to speak up much but you have been stewing for years and judging people along the way. “Me first!” How well is that workin’ for ya?

Or, are you STILL the kid who needs to be reminded to say “Thank you” and to think of others ahead of yourself? Your agenda for the day is most important and you’ll help if the return is good for you? “Me first!” How well is that workin’ for us if that is our only contribution to this world?

I have a bit of a nostalgic view of my childhood. Though I know now a bit more of the imperfections of my extended family, my growing years at the family farm will always be a gem of God’s gifts to me. I love my extended family—though most of the older generation is with Jesus as I speak. Why do I love them so? It is because of the glue that kept us together! Every Sunday at the farm, my grandpa—a man of few words—would pull the car out of the garage before church and wait for the rest of us, speaking a mouthful! “‘Jesus first’ is the strength of this family.” My grandma lived that by her life of “YOU before me.” Hospitality and service was her gift. Beds made and fresh apple crisp on the counter when we pulled in was how my grandma rolled! I can’t WAIT to see her in heaven, because the “You before me” that she learned from Jesus IS still the glue that keeps us together, the source of all the love!

1. We Are Called to Humility

a. As We Ponder Our Salvation

“As a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble... gentle...patient--bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.”

Does God struggle to have time for us—“YOU before me”? I mean, if anyone has a lot of things on his plate, it must be the Lord of the universe, right? And I gotta believe THIS world is not the only thing on his mind! And am I really that important and cool that I should jump off the page of God’s list of important tasks?

When we read the Bible, God seems pretty focused on US! “You before me” is the theme of Scripture. Our first week on the Family Church the Spirit reminded us that God chose us in Jesus before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight—forgiven. The Triune God planned our salvation and worked it out in service to US! God so loved the world that he gave... The Bible says that in all things, in all of life and throughout the world, he is at work! Just ponder God’s daily planner!

To assist him in his work, he took the time to give us a book—two Covenants, 66 books, 42-ish writers over 1500 years, Law and Gospel, accountability and grace—focused and resolved at the cross where Jesus’ focus was you and ME! “Father, forgive them...”

Oh, and prior to the cross, the Lord of the universe washed some gnarly feet to make sure that we would be able to picture what service, and the heart of a servant, looks like! ***“YOU before me,”*** says the humble King. ***“and through faith in me as Savior I have made you a part of God’s family for eternity, but also for humility and service in this life. Love as I have loved you. Heed the words of my servant, Paul, and live a life worthy of your calling.”***

Our God was humble and gentle and patient and forgiving with us that WE might live his legacy!

b. As We Ponder God’s Spirit Within Us

When Satan entered the Garden of Eden, the perfect, physical creation knew for the first time the presence of a “different” spirit. The Creator is love; the deceiver is hate. The Creator blesses; the deceiver spoils. The Creator puts you first; the deceiver is always and only “ALL ABOUT ME”. The Creator is freeing; the deceiver enslaves.

When visitors walk into this church, when visitors walk into your home, when friends and colleagues step into your space, do they sense the presence of a different Spirit than what they find in the world? Is your welcome authentic--no agenda...no product to sell? Is your interest in ME genuine or are you looking for benefit? In your Family Church or circle of friends, do people sense a different Spirit *in you* when you enter the room and the conversation? Do you typically exude joy and ooze optimism? Is “how are YOU doing” a *real* question followed by *actual* listening?”

WHY are you different? God tells us that it is because of the “different” Spirit that is in us—HIS Spirit! The Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts; the Holy Spirit who lives in this family; the Holy Spirit who fills this room—one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The Spirit of God who reminds us that our physical life is ONLY because of our Creator; that our eternal life is ONLY because of our Savior; and that our spiritual life is ONLY because of the Spirit himself! God’s service to US is the glue that keeps us together—he humbles us as he models for us “YOU before me”!

APPLICATION What is it that fractures “family”? Cousins who always fight. Brothers who no longer speak. Spouses who no longer love. Friends who once were but now no longer are. Children seeking safety in the wrong places and people, because the “right people” neglected to live the life worthy of their calling as parents?

What is it that fractures the family? Well, somehow, it is “ME”. When “ME” gets ahead of “YOU”. Now, please do not misunderstand. The fracture in “family” could be the “ME” that is me and NOT the “ME” that is you. Sometimes the sin of others fractures the family deeply and cleanly! If I am the “ME” that caused the break, may I repent of my sin before God and humbly receive his forgiveness, and then humbly come to you for forgiveness—“YOU before me.” If YOU are the ME, may you do the same. Whichever “ME” is the issue, Family Church us addresses that ME that the Spirit of holiness may restore the glue that bonds us together in love!

2. We Are Called to Service

a. By Virtue of Our Place

“Now, to each one grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in knowledge of the Son of God. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every wind of teaching and deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ...as each part does its work.

“YOU before me” is who we are in Family Church, and how awesome are MY roles in this life! By God’s grace, may we recognize our roles and see them as his blessing to each other and to OUR Family Church.

How far reaching is Family Church? Well, from Paul’s words, Jesus intends our roles for him to stretch as far as he gives us opportunity.

Thursday and Friday I was in Delaware serving an obvious and easy part of Family Church—my daughter and her family. Wrestling with my grandson, reading the book *Muddy Paws* to my granddaughter, conversation with my daughter, cramming their fridge and countertop with fun things and fun foods when they were gone for the day—blessing them all with the Name of the LORD before bedtime at night! Easy and obvious Family Church!

But then there was the cashier at the Walmart checkout. “Family Church” became evident as she was cheery and polite--which warmed my heart--and then I could assist her by helping identify my produce as “acorn squash” and then helping her find the bar code on her sheet for “acorn squash”. I almost asked her if she was part of the God’s family because I could just sense his Spirit!

And then I met a sister in Christ who warmed my heart and brought joy to Family Church! Misdee was her name. A friend and co-worker of my daughter who is a prayer warrior for our daughter and an encourager to her (call ANY time) because, “after all” Misdee said, “we are His hands and feet. We need to remind each other to ‘PLUG IN’ to our God”...and I thought, “Wow! I love this person! ‘YOU before me’ at work! The glue of Family Church!”

b. By Virtue of Our Purpose

And THEN I thought, “How awesome are our roles in God’s plan—ALL of us called and equipped to train and to build up the body of Christ in the exact places where HE has planted us!

You do ponder every day, don’t you, the fact that our lives are meant to build toward a tomorrow that is forever? We are NOT here to build up our kids for high paying jobs—which MIGHT happen—but we ARE here to build them up for an eternity in the presence of God through Jesus. We are NOT here to be nice to people for the purpose of having friends for time and a networking circle to line our wallets. We are here to add brothers and sisters TO the family of God and to build THEM up in Jesus for eternity AND for a more peaceful journey knowing God’s forgiveness, his promises and his walking with us along the way—quite often through our brothers and sisters, you and me--the hands and feet of Jesus.

APPLICATION So, on Thursday a portion of *my* Family Church enjoyed one of the most wonderful days I have ever spent on God’s planet—a beautiful beach on the Atlantic Ocean with God’s gifts of building sandcastles with grandchildren, teaching my grandson the awesomeness of waves at high tide, body surfing in those waves with my daughter, and watching pods of

dolphins just offshore! But, the most beautiful part of Family Church was the ride in the car. “Mommy,” said the just-turned-three Matt, “put on papa’s sermon, the Samson one.” And all of sudden it was weird, humbling and downright emotional to hear my voice and the “Failing Forward” sermon about Samson from this summer! Matt sat in his car seat with the Bridge playing on mommy’s i-phone and watched the whole thing—even yelling out his favorite line! I thought of my daughter and of Family Church and of the fact that THIS family here at St. Paul’s has a long reach through 2700 of us! From this sanctuary to our homes to Walmarts from here to Delaware, from our hearts to our children’s to our grandchildren’s and into eternity!

Oh, Family Church has some rough paths, some really TOUGH moments and places, but as we build each other up in Christ to know him better and to cling to his love, we begin to recognize more and more our purpose! Aaron Miller showed the way and the vision in our opening video—serving each where we are placed by God, how we are gifted by God and for the purposes of our God! **“You before me,” and Jesus will be known and the Family will be blessed!**

CONCLUSION I have a new friend through *this* family (St. Paul’s). I will call her Mary. You haven’t met her yet, probably. She sat at this family’s spiritual table the last two Good Fridays and LOVED the food! She sat through the equipping and training class known as *Following the Promise* and LOVES this family! I don’t believe she has joined us yet for regular worship but that will come. She loves Jesus; she loves his people—she loves the Spirit that dwells within us. THIS Jesus is new to her! But she is “stuck to him” for eternity, and she wants to be stuck to THIS Family Church here in time!

There are hardships she has been through; they run deep. But Jesus has touched the spiritual and emotional depths of her soul with his grace, his mercy, his love.

“**YOU before me’ is how I love,**” he has told her.

“**I like that in you,**” her faith responds. “**And I like it in your Family Church.**”

The GLUE—that keeps us together! Let’s keep living it, my friends that Jesus may be glorified, that his family may grow and our families be blessed! Amen.

Prepared by Pastor Nate Strobel
414-422-0320, ext. 293
nstrobel@stpaulmuskego.org