

**Extraordinarily Ordinary
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Ephesians 4: 1-13**

It's a joy to be with you this morning in worship. To be preaching again in this pulpit is a holy honor. The last time I preached here was on Senior Sunday in 2002. I don't remember what I said, but I guess it wasn't too terrible because I'm back again. All joking aside, I am so glad to be worshipping with you again. To come back here when I visit my family in West Chester is so comforting and encouraging. As I preach this morning, I am jumping right in to continue our sermon series on the Heidelberg Catechism "Comfort... in an age of anxiety."

We've turned to the third section of the Apostles' Creed- dealing with the Holy Spirit, and the sacraments. In these questions and answers in the Catechism we are reminded of the Holy Spirit's work in and around and through us. It's fitting that later in our service today we will celebrate the Lord's Supper together as this section of the Catechism speaks of the power of taking communion together.

In the passage of Scripture I've chosen, we see that Paul places high regard on the place of the community in the life of the believer. Paul shows how the church is God's creation and God's gift to his people. God gave us the church to build up the body of Christ- to build us all up in our faith.

While the Holy Spirit is only specifically mentioned in verse 4, we can see the work of the Spirit throughout the church and throughout the giftings that are given to each of us. We know that the Holy Spirit was given to the first believers at Pentecost, in Acts 2. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit," it says in verse 4.

Each of us has the Holy Spirit living within each of us- strengthening us, equipping us, leading us as we live out our faith in this time and this place. Craig Barnes writes in his book, "One of the primary places the Spirit works in our lives is through the community of the church." Question 54 in the Heidelberg Catechism asks, "What do you believe concerning the holy catholic church?" The answer says, "from the beginning of the world to its end, the Son of God through his Spirit and Word... gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community." This community is what the Apostles' Creed refers to a the holy catholic church. Remember the creed uses a lowercase c for catholic church- referring to the church universal, made up of many denominations and theological traditions.

When thinking about how the Spirit moves within a congregation, I inevitably think to my formative years at Westminster. Growing up at Westminster shaped me in more ways

than I am even aware. My memories of the church go back almost 3 decades: I know that somehow the Spirit was involved in all of it. Drinking lemonade and playing in the shade of the bell tree when the church was in the borough. Listening to Christmas Eve sermons while dressed as an angel as a part of the Christmas Eve play at the old church. Eating boxed dinners in a field over there while this church was being built. The coral colored t-shirt with Proverbs 22:6 on the back that was made the year we moved to our current location. I remember sitting right over there—during the big celebratory worship service. Because of that t-shirt, Proverbs 22:6 was the first Bible verse I committed to memory. “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Countless hours of Sunday school and youth group, mission trips and retreats. Begging my dad to help in the nursery instead of going to worship when I was in middle school. Each of the pastors who served here- too numerous to mention- whose sermons and leadership and interactions with me shaped me in huge ways... Confirmation in 1998. Preaching on Senior Sunday in 2002. Being an intern here in the summer of 2005. My wedding to my husband Austin in 2008.

The vast majority of these moments were so ordinary and yet God’s Spirit is at work in them, planting seeds, nurturing seeds, growing each of us into deeper discipleship and commitment to Jesus Christ. What I realize as I reflect on this is the sheer number of people who upheld the vow they made at my baptism in 1984. Whenever a baby is baptized in this church, or in any Presbyterian Church, the pastor or session member asks a question to the congregation- and the congregation promises to uphold the commitment they are making. In 1984, those gathered in worship that day promised to “guide and nurture Sara by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging her to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of this church.”

Each of them, and by proxy, each person who becomes a member of this church promises to help the parent teach their child about Jesus Christ and his love.

This shows in such a real way that the church is a community created by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for the mission of bringing the world back to life through communion with God. This isn’t a place where we belong simply to hang out with people who share our values and experiences. This isn’t a place for saints.

Being a part of a church is a way to see God at work around us and through us. It’s a place to interact with people who are also broken- who are also sinners- people who might not share our values and experiences, but who nevertheless seek to follow Jesus Christ in this world. Being a part of a church is a reminder that we can’t live out our faith alone. My faith is molded, shaped, and held accountable by the witness of each of your faiths. Your leadership on a committee, your insight in a Sunday School class, your guidance on a mission trip, your voice singing in the choir, your rocking babies in the nursery so their parents can be refueled in worship.

My life growing up was very ordinary, as each of you are living fairly ordinary lives, yet through the power of the Holy Spirit, God uses the ordinary for extraordinary purposes. The Spirit who gathers the church also supplies its leaders and equips the church “for the work of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

The work we do together as a church is greater than any of us could do on our own. God gave each of us gifts, and we use these gifts in service to God “¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” as it says in verse 13.

Question 55 in the Heidelberg Catechism asks “What do you understand by the communion of the saints?” The answer is “First, that believers one and all, as partakers of the Lord Christ, and all his treasures and gifts, shall share in one fellowship. Second, that each one ought to know that he is obliged to use his gifts freely and with joy for the benefit and welfare of other members.”

When each of you uses the gifts God has given you, you encourage the other members of this church. You bring out the best in them as the Holy Spirit is working in you. My encouragement to each of you is to figure out your vocation- figure out what God has created you to do, and then to keep doing that. Not only as it relates to your life outside of the community of Westminster, but within the community of Westminster, too. Serving as a VBS volunteer or serving a meal at Safe Harbor with your church family may seem ordinary. Being on the nominating committee seems ordinary, and God bless you who serve on the nominating committee but you have the power to encourage others in their faith which is extraordinary. I remember exactly where I was when Claudia Beckmann from the nominating committee called me to ask if I would serve as a Deacon in college. I was shocked that someone else saw potential in me. Everything you do used by God to bring about His purposes on earth. I am who I am today not only because of my parents and my education, but because of the people and experiences I had at Westminster.

Our primary task in all this is to “be worthy” of this high calling by “making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” How are we made worthy? We are made worthy through Jesus Christ and his grace. None of us can be made worthy on our own- regardless of our service to the church or the gifts given to us by the Spirit.

Through God’s grace we are made worthy. The answer to question 56 says that because of Christ’s reconciling work, “God will no more remember my sins or the sinfulness with which I have to struggle all my life long.” Each of us who has been justified through Christ has therefore received the Holy Spirit and has the capacity to serve God with the fruits and gifts of the Spirit. This fruit and these gifts come naturally from the work of the Spirit in our lives.

The sacraments nurture this identity in Christ- as one who is forgiven and freed by God in Jesus Christ. Craig Barnes writes, “When I stand behind the pulpit on Sunday morning, I use words to tell the congregation that Jesus Christ was dying to love them. When I stand in front of the Lord’s table, offering them his broken body and poured out blood, I present the sacred kiss that communicates that same thing as the sermon, but in ways that go far beyond the limits of words.” (p 98)

We are met by the Holy Spirit at the table, this table of grace, and strengthened and nourished to go out and continue our calling as apostles of Christ. Each of you is doing something extraordinarily ordinary by being a part of this church community. May you be encouraged to recommit to serving God through the ministries of this church. May you be encouraged to remember the role of the Holy Spirit that is at work in your own heart and throughout this group of imperfect people, striving to know Christ and make Christ known. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.