



## The Nourishing Vocation Project

### Engaging the Living Word

### Ephesians 4:1-6

#### What is this particular text?

- A call to unity
- An urgent *plea* from a prisoner
  - The writer is begging
- Part of a letter
- Reminder of calling

#### How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- Emphasizes the very center of faith – the one God, who is “above all and through all and in all”
- Reminder of God’s call upon human life
- Reminder that call is both personal and collective

#### How can this text function in the church today?

- Invitation to assess what we’ve placed our faith in that isn’t God
- What does this plea, this begging, for unity mean for us as Christians today?
- In what ways has the church failed at this call to unity?
  - In what ways has it succeeded?
- Invitation to ponder the church’s call today

#### What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- Reassures me
- My calling feels affirmed
- Raises questions about how to be patient and gentle in a world that’s so cruel to transgender people
- Makes me feel intimidated – leading a life “worthy of the calling” feels like an insurmountable task

#### What do you have to say to the text?

- It’s hard to be patient and act with gentleness in a world that can be so cruel and cold and unforgiving
- The author isn’t asking, they’re *begging*; there must be a lot at stake here
- Why does the author describe themselves as a “prisoner in the Lord?”

#### What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- It is God who calls
- There is unity in the one God
- Calling comes from the one faith, which is found in the one God, who is “above all and through all and in all”
- The author speaks of unity, not sameness
  - Unity is not uniformity



### **What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)**

- Placing faith in institutions and/or worldly powers rather than placing faith in God leading to death-dealing beliefs and actions
- Divisions
- Death-dealing biases and beliefs that create rifts
  - Efforts to affirm and support those most affected by this
- Reminder of the one baptism that the one God has called us into
  - Reminder of who it is we worship
- Reminder that the calling we have been called to is rooted in gentleness, patience, and love – all of which comes not from ourselves, but from God
- Crises of today
  - Misplaced faith
  - Weaponized beliefs
  - Divided society

### **What do you see within yourself?**

- Wrestling with the tension and disunity within my own self
- Wrestling with external tension and disunity as I move through the world
- Finding hope in my calling
  - And sometimes struggling to do this
- Times when I haven't felt as though my life is "worthy of the calling"

### **What is the context – textual and historical?**

- Authorship questioned – likely authored by a disciple of Paul and not Paul himself
- Likely written after Paul's death
- Follows a prayer for the author's readers
- Precedes a passage about gifts given by Christ

### **What questions does this text raise for you?**

- How do I seek unity when I live in the midst of so much disunity?
- What does it mean to seek unity in a world where I am hated because of my identity?
- What does the author mean when they describe themselves as a "prisoner in the Lord?"
- What does it mean to be "worthy of the calling?"
- What tore this particular audience apart that the author is begging them to maintain unity?
- What does bearing with one another in love mean?
  - What does it look like? Feel like? Taste like? Smell like?
  - What's it like to be the one others need to bear with? How does it feel to receive that?
- How does unity look different when we center the experiences of those who are most marginalized?
- How do I work toward unity when so many people don't take me seriously because of the way they perceive my gender?

### **What words/themes seem of particular import?**

- "One body"
- "One Spirit"
- Worthy



- Calling
- “Above all and through all and in all”
- “With all humanity and gentleness”
- Beg
- “Bearing with”

#### **What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?**

- God is above all, through all, and in all – all that we are, all that we do, all around us, there God is
- There is hope in our calling(s)
- In God, we are never alone – community in baptismal promise
- Because God loves us, we are able to lead a life “worthy of the calling.” God has made us worthy, and nothing can undo this

#### **What is the as-over-againstness of this text?**

- Confessing belief in one God entails letting go of our attachment to what isn’t God
- There is much we need to let go of if one is to follow this call to unity
  - White supremacy
  - Sexism
  - Queer/trans phobia
  - Unquestioned loyalty to institutions
  - Classism
  - Attachment to money
- Idolatry creates false unity

#### **Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?**

- God is one
- There is unity in God
- God is above, through, and in all

#### **What have others said about this text?**

- [“A unity that comes because](#) people are afraid to address concerns or disagreements is not a true unity. A unity that comes because some people are marginalized or pushed out of the church is not a true unity. A unity that comes because people talk about person A to person B is not a true unity.” Susan Ortman

#### **What will I teach or proclaim?**

- If God is above, through, and in all, that includes us. God in Christ remains within and all around us through the Holy Spirit. No earthly power or institution can be God or do what God has done for us. This is why we put our trust in God. This is why when we work for peace and unity, we do so firmly planted in the Gospel
- God has made you worthy of your calling. God has made you worthy, period.
- We all feel unworthy of the calling at some point
- Following God is risky. Allowing ourselves to become divided because we’ve placed our trust in powers and institutions that aren’t God is even riskier.
- We do not follow our calling(s) alone
- We have a powerful community in God, who continually draws us in
- Our baptism is a promise that in God, we will never, ever be alone



- God calls us to a radical unity, a unity formed by bearing with one another in love
- It's important to distinguish between unity and sameness. The author calls for unity, not uniformity. Unity requires diversity
  - Our calling to unity in God requires the inclusion of diversity; not the mere invitation, not the mention, but the *full* inclusion and embrace
- Authentic Christian unity requires that we center the bodies and experiences of those who are most marginalized