

Who we are and what we do (Ephesians 4:1-16)

The growth and the flourishing of the body of Christ is measured by its love.

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The weaving together of doctrine and ethics in this week's epistle reading makes my heart sing. Here, I think, Paul is laying out for his readers the beating heart of the practice of Christian faith. There is no separation here between theory and praxis, between the supernatural and the pragmatic, between worship and justice. It's all here, and not like two items set next to each other on a table but like the union of flour and water to make bread, in which neither can be seen or understood on its own any longer, but both are now determined by their relationship to the other.

We do what we do because of who and what we are: the lives we live are to be in keeping with the calling to which we have been called. Humility and gentleness and patience are to be the hallmarks of Christian community not because these are traits that ordinarily characterize human interactions in community—they aren't, in my experience—but rather because they are traits that characterize Jesus Christ, into whose one body we have been baptized. We love because we have been made one with Christ.

We are who we are because of what we have been called to do: faith without works is dead, and the growth and the flourishing of the body of Christ is measured by its love. The grace of Christ's gift is not for our private enjoyment but to equip each one

of us for the work of ministry. This is what it means to grow into Christ and a full and mature knowledge of him—to live as if our physical bodies on earth really are meant to serve as his hands and feet, to make our actions his actions too and not merely our own, to embody his love in the transformation of our own love.

In our union with Christ and with one another we come to learn, day by day, what love really is and means. For the Christian, love cannot be fully understood without reference to the love embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, and Jesus of Nazareth cannot be understood at all without clear and direct reference to the love that defined and drove each moment of his earthly life, from its earliest beginning to his death, resurrection, and ascension. This love that he is becomes our own in baptism—our own to know, to enjoy, and above all to share with all the world.