

“A Life Worthy”
Ephesians 4, selected verses
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On the occasion of Kent Kinney’s 50th Anniversary of Ordination

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until 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. ... Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

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Fifty years ago, on June 17, 1959, Reverend Kent Kinney was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. He had not grown up in a Christian home. He became a Christian at UCLA because a fellow student reached out to him. He embraced the claims of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and dedicated his life to Christ's service.

Twenty years ago, on May 28, 1987, Reverend Kent Kinney candidated from this pulpit for the position of Associate Pastor. We thought we might get

him to stay for five years. We're still hoping for another five. Though his title has changed over time – he is now a “Parish Associate” – his passion has not. This is what he said about his strategy for ministry then: “to love people wherever they are in Christian experience, then encourage them to grow in their understanding of God’s call to them.” It is his strategy still.

From the beginning, Kent has understood that it is not just *clergy* who are called to ministry. Every *Christian* is called by God to serve Christ’s church. St. Paul emphatically says: “I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” Today, I want to explore what our calling means to each of us.

First, not every call looks alike. Calling to Christian service differs according to the gifts that are given to each person, as the grace of Jesus Christ as seen fit. In St. Paul’s day, some were “apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” In modern times, the list has been added to: some are administrators, some financial wizards, some musicians,

some technology geeks. And Christ's church needs all of them. Yesterday morning I was in a meeting with the Committee dealing with our property next door at 750 N. Sheridan Road. A couple of us were all about communication with the congregation. Others were savvy about interaction with the city. And when it came time for looking through contracts for services, it was clear to me that Lynnette Hinch and I were not the ones to do this. Thank God for the gifts of Chris Coffin and others who do that kind of work all the time. God's calling is not exclusively for pastors – it is for every Christian. Every calling doesn't look the same. There are different gifts, and all are needed.

Second, there is no room for divas in Christ's church. Some words Kent Kinney wrote twenty years ago still ring true: "No one can bear witness to Jesus Christ and to himself at the same time." My favorite Zen saying is: "Never confuse the finger pointing to the moon with the moon." We are not the moon; we are the fingers pointing to the moon - that is, to Jesus Christ our Lord. When we confuse them, the very excellence that makes a congregation thrive can lead to its downfall. We can start glorifying the wrong thing: a

preacher who knocks the house down. A choir that is technically stupendous. A renowned mission program. Don't get me wrong: we must strive for excellence. It disturbs me profoundly when we take for granted God's loving and forgiving nature and toss our leftovers into the offering plate, literally or figuratively. We must bring our best to the Lord: not to glorify ourselves, but to glorify God. The church is a diva-free zone.

Finally, no matter what our gifts, we share one common calling: in St. Paul's words, "building up the body of Christ. ... With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." One of the things I cherish about Kent is the way he models this behavior. Unlike me, he doesn't have a "snarky" bone in his body. He sets the tone for the rest of us. Now, every congregation has its strengths and weaknesses – no church has yet achieved perfection. Over time habits set in, and in my research of this congregation's 150 years, I've come to appreciate the one weakness we are prone to. This won't surprise you who have been here a long time! Like a

muscle that is prone to strain or a bone that is vulnerable to breaking, we are prone to criticism, impatience, and judgment. But when we allow ourselves to fall into that behavior, we are diminishing everything else we may have accomplished. So Scripture instructs us: “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” We are called to build one another up, to strengthen each other in the body of Christ.

Fifty years. It’s been fifty years since Kent Kinney took his vows of ministry. Twenty years since he came to serve among us. We have no trouble seeing what his gifts have been, and how faithfully he has offered himself to build up the body of Christ in this place. His patience, his forbearance, his sense of humor, his compassion: they have been treasures to us all. And I trust God will use them still for years to come. And what, then, about you?

Together we are the body of Christ and individually members of Him, each one of us has been given gifts to use for the common good, to build up the body of Christ. Some are pastors and teachers, some are administrators, some are financial wizards and some are technology geeks. Some are knitting prayer shawls, some serve on the Prayer Chain, some make designs of beauty in the flowers or in the building itself, some keep the water running. Some of us, besides in this place, are called to go out of here as evangelists too. Kent wouldn't be here, not because of a minister, but Kent wouldn't be here if another student hadn't shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with him. There are different gifts. It is the same Spirit that gives them. Beloved in Christ, let the Spirit work through you, of building one another for the common good.

Amen.