6/26/22 web **Eph. 4: 1-6 NCV**

 The core theme for our reflections on Ephesians has been our need to focus on understanding God by using “the eyes of our heart”. Although it may seem like a strange expression- the eyes are instruments by which we see and perceive the world around us- so it makes sense to use our heart- the place where God resides- to enable us to see WHAT Christ wants us to know so that we can understand God’s truth.

 Last week we focused on this insight as we spoke about the enormity of Christ’s love for us when we heard that Christ’s love reaches Wide, high, long and deep touching EVERY nook and cranny of our life & experiences- helping us to know that we’re NEVER unloved or alone.

 We also spoke about a tree. That when we’re wracked by unsettling challenges or emotions, we SHOULD look at a tree- the branches sway, but the trunk remains firm. If we live as if we only have branches, it means we’ve forgotten WHO our tree is rooted into. On the other hand, when we grow our roots into Christ’s love – even IF it feels like our branches are caught in a hurricane-we can feel secure.

 I have another thought about a tree and this one applies to what we will be reflecting on today. It’s from Romans 11:16- “*If the roots of a tree are holy. Then the trees branches are holy too*.” When OUR BRC tree’s roots are grown into God- we draw up God’s love and holiness into ourselves.

 I believe that this is necessary for us to understand as we reflect on WHAT it MEANS to be Christ’s body of believers called “the Church” as shared in Eph.

*4:1-6. I am in prison because I belong to the Lord. Therefore I urge you who have been chosen by God to live up to the life to which God called you. Always be humble, gentle, and patient, accepting each other in love. You are joined together with peace through the Spirit, so make every effort to continue together in this way. There is one body and one Spirit, and God called you to have one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. There is one God and Father of everything. He rules everything and is everywhere and is in everything*.

 We hear in this passage that not only IS God’s power working IN us, God can DO so much more B/C God’s power is working THROUGH us. Not through some of us, but IF we allow it- through ALL of us. I’ve mentioned this before. I DO NOT believe that those who come here or those who will come- is just a coincidence. I believe we’re called, gathered, and united together so that we can live up to the purpose God has for us individually and AS his church- this church and his universal church.

 Last week I had mentioned that Paul’s letter to the Ephesians wasn’t a letter sent to confront a problem, it was sent as encouragement to strengthen the believers there by reminding them of their need for unity IN their commitment to Christ.

 Our reflection today, isn’t to speak of a problem here either, it’s being offered as encouragement to strengthen us and our need to assure that our unity is INTACT so that our commitment to Christ can be felt and seen. Although it’s important for us to fulfill our call so we can live up to God’s purpose for us, just as with any building, we first need to assure that the foundation of THIS body of Christ isn’t in need of repairs.

 Our 1st inspection needs to focus on our mortar. By knowing that God HAS joined us together, we can embrace & celebrate our unity- knowing that B/C of and through Christ; we’re ONE body, one faith- serving one Lord. However, just B/C we’re one body -united by Christ, it doesn’t mean that unity means sameness or uniformity. We aren’t exact replicas of each other nor are we to assume that we need to think, process information, look, or act the same.

 We have different views about creation, the world, secular things, theology and/or HOW we’re to do ministry. Having or expressing these differences isn’t a problem. In fact, in my mind, THESE differences show the beauty of our diversity making being the body of Christ EXCITING!

 Nevertheless, part of the inspection process of our foundation, is to assure that the attitude of our hearts ties us together with peace. Why? B/C we can see examples of what happens all around us WHEN attitudes of unity in the Spirit are NOT nurtured.

 And when they’re NOT peace is lost- allowing for controversies and divisions to boil -causing foundations to crack and crumble. I believe this is WHAT Paul was trying to PREVENT in the churches THEN and NOW as he encourages believers to be mindful of HOW we’re treating each other. In thinking about this, Proverbs 3:3-6 came to mind. *Let love and faithfulness never leave you; wear them like a necklace, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will please both God and people. Trust the Lord with all your heart, and don’t depend on your own understanding. Remember the Lord in all you do, and he will give you success.*

 Love and faithfulness ARE important. Both involve actions as well as attitudes. They’re so important that we’re to wear them like a necklace so that every time we feel it or see it around our neck, we’re reminded of HOW we’re to act.

 To further remind us, we’re to write them on our hearts so that IF we forget to put our necklace on, our attitudes will remain humble, gentle, and patient, able to accept each other’s faults with love and respect.

But this will also help us to not only see each other’s gifts, but it WILL help us to lift them up, celebrate them, and encourage all to use of them B/C they’re gifts that have been given to each of us by the HS. This is what Paul shared with the churches in 1 Corinth 12:4-7.

*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other*.

 God creates a unique place IN the body for EVERY believer B/C EVERY believer is given Spiritual gifts by the HS so the body of Christ can function well together- able to fulfill God’s call-God’s purpose for us in our community and world.

 And to assure this WILL happen we must think about HOW we’re united which will help to weave us together and keep us strong- always working to tighten our weave so that we’re kept close, but loose enough to allow other people, with varying thoughts and ways IN.

 Again, we DO this well & to KEEP doing this well, I encourage us to continue to focus on WHAT we agree on rather than what we disagree on, allow new ideas- new ways of being the church to be heard & discussed-so we can blossom enabling us to be a fragrant offering FOR Christ to those around us.

 However, DOING all this does more- it keeps God and what God WANTS in the center of our ideas, conversations and decisions- and we’re told that when this happens, God WILL give us success! I encourage us to open the eyes of our hearts so that with the HS’s guidance we can see where God is leading and how we’re to work together in a new ways to fulfill God’s purpose so that ALL will be saved- giving hope to people for today and eternity.

 I pray that we will ALL ask God to open our eyes to see all God has for us. For such awareness helps us to live RESPONSIVELY as God’s holy branches- God’s holy people- God’s family. Next week we will build on this thought- as we reflect on WHAT it means to be in God’s family as we get ready to use the eyes of our hearts in preparation in going out to do God’s will as Christ’s heart and hands.