Affirming our Faith through the Apostles' Creed
I Believe in the Holy Christian Church

Text: Ephesians 4:1-6 -- I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Introduction: In our message two weeks ago on the Apostles' Creed, we looked at what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit in **John 7:37-39** and noted the following**: Anyone can receive the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. When someone does, that person receives God's forgiveness presence, truth, power and love. And the really good news is that these blessings are not something we can only look forward to when we're with the Lord in heaven, but they are the reality for everyone who believes right now!** This morning, I want to look at the next line that says, **"I believe in the Holy Catholic (Christian – the word catholic means univseral) Church.** It may not surprise you to learn that the 21st-century church in America is at an important crossroads with a lot riding on the direction we choose for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren moving forward. Consider the results of a Barna Study published in 2023: One of the most widely watched measures of the nation's faith is attendance at Christian churches and that measure has dropped significantly since the pandemic. The proportion of adults who attend church services every week has fluctuated between 30% and 40% over the past decade. At the start of the pandemic, 39% of adults attended a Christian church service at least once a week. The 2023 statistics indicate a notable decline in such attendance, dipping to 33%. More significant, however, is the rapid growth among adults who attend church services infrequently (i.e., less than once a month) or never. That segment has jumped from 35% to 56% in the past six years, with most of the growth since the start of the pandemic. In 2020, 41% of adults attended services infrequently or not at all; by 2023, that figure rose to 56%—a majority of the nation.

We all know that church attendance doesn't guarantee that a person is a follower of Christ. Still, it is important because the Bible commands us to gather together (**See Hebrews 10:24-25**). I believe you're here today (*no matter what generation you're a part of*) because you sincerely believe that worshipping our Lord with others in the body of Christ does matter ... ***that Christians do far better at loving***

God, ourselves, and others when we're together than when we're isolated as individuals. In short, you believe in the church. Now, of course, this begs the question, "What is the Church?" **It is the community of all true believers for all time *(Systematic Theology, Grudem, p. 853).*** The church is made up of everyone who is truly saved ... those who have been redeemed by Christ's death ... including saints from both the Old Testament age and New Testament age**. Some people refer to this as** the universal church**.** The local church **refers to a group of believers that meet together in a particular location and at a specific time. The church is not a building though we often think of it in that way. The church is made up of people. The word (ekklesia) means "CALLED OUT ONES" and tells us that** Christians are people who have been called out of this world system that is under the rule of Satan (... the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient -- Ephesians 2:2) to live for Jesus Christ as members of His body **(…Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior – Ephesians 5:23).**

Over the next twenty-five minutes or so as we consider **Ephesians 4:1-6**, I hope to remind you of the importance of the body of Christ to affect one another as we seek to live out our high calling.

The Challenge to the Church (**Ephesians 4:1 -- As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received**). Like many of Paul's letters, the first half of Ephesians is ***theological***. It covers the basis for our faith ... our salvation (**1:18 -- to know the hope to which He has called you**), while the second half is more ***practical*** in its instruction. It focuses on how saved people are called to live, Paul, himself, being a very good example for us as **'a prisoner for the Lord**.' **In case you've forgotten, the apostle was in prison for the cause of Christ when he wrote this letter**. So clearly he was not saying, "***Do as I say***," but "***Do as I do***." But what was it Paul was asking of them? **HE URGED THEM TO LIVE A LIFE WORTHY OF** (*in conformity with*) **THE CALLING** (*salvation*) **THEY HAD RECEIVED**. **Earlier he had reminded them of the blessings of their salvation ... that they had been united with Christ in His resurrection and exaltation so that they share in His rule (1:20-22), they were reconciled to God by Christ's death and called into one new humanity. They were now members of God's household and had access to the Father by means of the Holy Spirit**. Now he wants them to see that with the **great privileges** of God's calling, however, come **great responsibilities**. God expects something from His children!

Most of us ... when we hear the words, "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required**" think about rich people who need to be generous**

with others. They should not hoard their wealth to themselves. That's a possible interpretation, but another is just as likely. Jesus is issuing a warning to those who know the Master's will, but don't do it ... they are subject to his judgment **(*This comes from Jesus' teaching of the faith and wise manager from*** Luke 12:48**),"** *Paul wants every Christian to know that with the privilege of being called God's child comes the responsibility of living up to His reputation*. **We must live a life worthy of our calling unlike the person in this story:**

From 2015 through mid-2022, Jeffrey Kriv received 51 tickets, but paid only two. Kriv had become adept at beating his tickets in court by telling a particular story explaining his behavior. An investigation by Pro Publica found three specific recent examples: (1) "Well, that morning, I broke up with my girlfriend and she stole my car," said Kriv in January 2021, after being spotted running a red light; (2) "Yeah, I broke up with my girlfriend earlier that morning, had a knock-down, drag-out fight, verbally, of course. She took my car without my knowledge," he told a different judge when fighting a speeding ticket in August 2021; (3) "I broke up with my girlfriend that day and she took my car without my knowledge," said Kriv again in May 2022 while contesting another speeding ticket. "I didn't get my car back for like three days. But it was her driving the car." Pro Publica found that he told a version of this story on at least 44 different occasions, without letting on that he himself worked as an officer for the Chicago Police Department (his calling in life). Kriv was repeatedly reprimanded for misconduct while on the job, including complaints filed by fellow officers. Prosecutors charged Kriv with four counts of perjury and five counts of forgery. All counts are felonies and are for allegedly lying to judges under oath and providing fictitious police reports. NOT EXACTLY THE KIND OF EXEMPLARY LIFE ONE WOULD EXPECT FROM A POLICE OFFICER.

The next two verses explain what living a life worthy of our calling as Christ-followers looks like.

The Characteristics of the Church (Ephesians 4:2-3 -- Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace). Living worthy of our calling demands a qualitatively different lifestyle from what we see in so many outside the church. (1) **We are to be "humble" in our treatment of one another. It means to be LOWLY OF MIND.** John Wesley **observed that neither the Greeks or Romans had a word for "**humility**." People who lacked pride were considered** weak and cowardly**. It was so contrary to their way of thinking that** it was Christians **(perhaps Paul)** who actually coined the word**. Even after it appeared in**

Christian writings, for many years pagans who borrowed the word only ever used it derogatorily. *But, as you already know, humility is a very Christ-like quality*! **The only way we can please God is to be humble as Christ was (Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to grasped, but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant and being made in the likeness of men ... and He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross -- Philippians 2:6-8). Think about it. The Son of God did not seek His own glory but poured Himself out for us! Now we're called to the same treatment of one another and quickly discover that this is the only way to live in a way that pleases God ... "He who exalts hImself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted!"** (2) **We are to be gentle. This is also the term for meekness. It means strength under control. It's a picture of a wild animal that has been tamed so that it is under the control of its master. It is the opposite of being vindictive and vengeful. Paul says that gentleness is necessary in confronting a brother or sister in sin (Galatians 6:1). Jesus was meek and lowly in heart and so we are to be as well. (3) We are to be patient.** Christians **(*and the church since that is just a group of Christians meeting together in a local assembly*)** ought to be willing to suffer with others longer than anyone else**. A patient person endures negative circumstances because he sees God's hand at work in and through them. He is not hopeless because he knows that God is at work in us to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). In other words, we can trust Him for a "good" outcome. This is the reason we can "bear with one another in love."**

Humility, gentleness and patience (*exemplified in bearing with one another in love*) are essential to our life together as the church. Without them, we have no hope of maintaining the Spirit's unity through the bond of peace. A study reported in ***Psychological Science*** discovered that the "**best**" resolvers of arguments are those who don't point their fingers. According to the study, the person who says "**we**" the most during an argument suggests the best solutions. Researchers from **the University of Pennsylvania** and **the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** used statistical analysis to study **59** couples. Spouses who used **second-person pronouns** (you) tended toward negativity in interactions. Those making use of **first-person plural pronouns** (we) provided positive solutions to problems. The study concluded: "**'We' users may have a sense of shared interest that sparks compromise (collaboration) and other ideas pleasing to both partners. 'You'-sayers, on the contrary, tend to criticize, disagree, justify, and otherwise team with negativity**." When **we** walk together in the power of the Holy Spirit in humility, gentleness and patience, rather than pointing

a finger at one another, the body of Christ maintains the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace because we get along well. **That's how we avoid the charge of hypocrisy or inauthenticity**!

The Confession of the Church (**Ephesians 4:4-6 -- There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all**). As a strong motivation for his appeal for unity, Paul provides seven statements using the word "one", intended to remind us of the fundamental unities of the Christian faith. Three allude to the Spirit, Son (Lord) and Father in that order while the remaining four pertain to our relationship to the God who is three-in-one. **(1) One body and one Spirit** -- The body is a reference to the church, Christ's body, made up of all true believers in Him. **Each local church is a visible expression of that body which is by its very nature ... one**. How can the body of our Lord be divided (**1 Corinthians 1:13 -- Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?**)? The one Spirit (the Holy Spirit) brings unity to the body. We are members of the body by virtue of His work (**By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- 1 Corinthians 12:13**). **(2)** This brings us to the phrase **'one hope when you were called**.' While it may be difficult for some of us to wrap our minds around this, God elected us to know Christ before the foundation of the world (**Ephesians 1:4**). **We share one hope because He called us not on the basis of works, but by His own choice**. **Now as a result of that calling we have one Lord, one faith, one baptism**. " **Lord**" refers to Jesus. "***Jesus is Lord***" is the earliest confession of the church. For Christians there can be no other. "**Faith**" is the act of believing in Him which is common to all true Christians. "**Baptism**" is the acknowledgement that we are united into one body because we have put on Christ (**Galatians 3:27 -- For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ**). **(3) It is one God and Father of all who is over all** (*He rules over not only the church, but everything else that exists*) **and through all and in all** (*He is always present among us*).

For we, the church, to live worthy of our calling, to be unified in the bond of peace and hold fast to our confession we must regularly meet together. We were never designed by God to accomplish these three objectives while living in isolation from one another. ***We can only achieve them when we are doing life together as the body of Christ***. For a while, I have been thinking about how to engage millennials (*the 16 to 30 year-olds*) who we're told are non-traditional in many of their views ... though I would argue that some traditions are worth keeping. A big one is to make worship a priority instead of an option. Here's proof that it really matters!

The Marriage and Religion Research Institute sites U. S. federal surveys (including ***The General Social Survey***, The ***National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health*** and ***The National Survey of Family Growth***) that repeatedly show the benefits to the family that participates in weekly religious worship. I hope these encourage you to maintain a strong relationship with the body of Christ: **(1)** We are more satisfied in our marriages; **(2)** We get along better with our children; **(3)** Our children do better in school and get in trouble less often; **(4)** We volunteer more frequently for charitable activities; **(5)** We are generally happier in life; **(6)** We struggle less with addictions; **(7)** We tend to have a higher opinion of others; **(8)** We are less likely to engage in immoral behaviors. These are just a few of the results that are cited in their report, but I'm sure you get the idea. People do better when they're attached to the local church.

Conclusion: In **Philippians 2:15**, Paul likens Christians to shining stars. When something shines, it is merely reflecting the light of something else. The scientific term is **albedo**. **It's a measurement of how much sunlight a celestial body reflects**. The planet **Venus,** for example, has the highest albedo at **.65**. In other words, **65** percent of the light that hits Venus is reflected. Depending on where it's at in its orbit, the "*almost-a-planet*" **Pluto** has an albedo ranging from **.49** to .**66**. Our night light, **the moon**, has an albedo of **.07**. Only seven percent of the sunlight that reaches the moon is reflected, yet it lights our way on cloudless nights. In a similar sense, the church has a spiritual **albedo. It's a measurement of how much of God's light we reflect**. The goal? ***One hundred percent reflectivity***. **The degree to which we reflect the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is largely contingent on how well we function together as the church**. We are called to oneness just as God is one. Remember: ***We do not produce light. We only reflect it***.

NOW JOIN ME AND LET'S DECLARE WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH BY RECITING TOGETHER THE APOSTLES' CREED.

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I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into Hades; The third day He rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.