

ALL SAINTS CHURCH

2 FEBRUARY 2025

WALK THE TALK



Deuteronomy 10: 12 -22
Ephesians 4: 1 - 23

As some of you know I have not long returned safely – as you can see - from a week-long tour of Algeria when we were following in the footsteps of St Augustine. Or to be more precise we were following Patrick Whitworth who was doing research on St Augustine that great fourth century theologian, writer, pastor and bishop. The book will come out later this year I think. If you ask me what was the highlight of our tour it was probably the 200 mile police-car and motorcycle escort we had on our last day as we were conducted into the heart of Algiers and to the hotel where the allies planned the North African campaign during the second world war.

Well that is all by the by. If you want to hear more about Augustine, do come to the Tuesday service, not this week but the week after.

Now to today's talk on this fourth chapter of Ephesians, To help us understand it better, I would like you to visualize a mountain a pair of legs and a wardrobe.

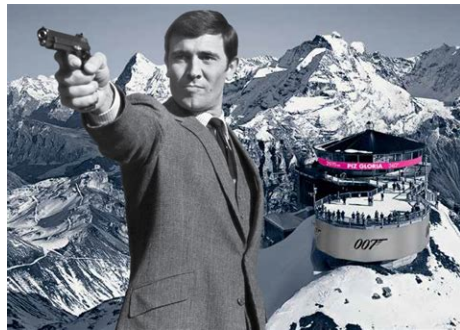


Let's start with the mountain. Does anyone recognise where this is?



Yes – it is the restaurant and cable car station at top of a mountain in Switzerland called the Schilthorn. I expect a number of you have been there, maybe skied there or walked there. I was there pretty much exactly four years ago along with Tony Haines. Has anyone else been there?

It was of course the setting for a James Bond film called On Her Majesty's Secret Service. Apparently the restaurant and cable car at the top was only half finished and the company owning it had run out of money. The film makers agreed to fund the finishing of it so that they could use it as the location for the film.



The Alps like all mountain ranges are a thing of wonder and of beauty. So let's for a moment leave this cold dull February morning and imagine that we are on holiday in summer in Switzerland and we have come to the picturesque town of Murren which lies at the foot of the Schilthorn. We decide it would be lovely to get to the top of one of this iconic mountain and we buy our tickets for one of the gondola cable cars which will take us to the very top of the mountain.



We step inside it, the weather is perfect, blue skies and cotton wool puffs of white cloud. As we climb higher the meadows below are filled with Alpine flowers and here and there, cattle are wandering and the sound of the bells around their necks can just about be heard. As we climb higher and higher, more and more mountains come into view.



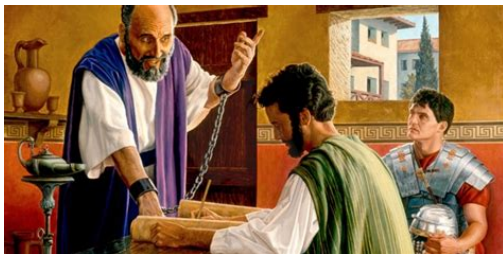
The scale of it all, the beauty of it, the majesty of it takes our breath away and then there is the slight nervous excitement you feel with the swaying of the gondola and the sight of that steeply climbing rocky ground and as we get higher snow covered ground hundreds of feet below. It is intoxicating, exciting and we are oh so glad we came and so thankful that everything is bathed in this glorious sunshine.

And then the cable car gets to the end of its journey. We step outside, we take our photographs, we have a coffee or maybe a hot chocolate covered in cream and then we think about returning. But this time we are not going to take the cable car, we are going to walk down the mountain, all the way to Murren and maybe even farther down all the way into Lauterbrunnen.

I expect by now you have guessed that this is all an image of the Book of Ephesians haven't you? No? Well you are a bit slow on the uptake. So let me explain.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians which is known by some as the Queen of the Epistles has six chapters and so far we have covered the first three so we are halfway. And in terms of words it is practically half way and in terms of the structure of the letter, it is exactly halfway. We are at the turning point, the hinge of the book.

And in those first three chapters, we have, as it were being carried up in a gondola to the top of a mountain whilst all around us are yet more mountains. The first three chapters are a breath-taking description of all the God has purposed and done. Of all that God has done for us in Christ. Of all the blessings and goodness and grace that has been poured out on us.



If we could have seen the Apostle Paul dictating it, we would probably have seen a man with bright eyes pouring out these words and prayers in a great torrent as he paced up and down his prison cell. The golden phrases poured off his tongue, as inspired by the Holy Spirit he gives his first hearers and all hearers and readers since, a glimpse of glory. Let me remind you of some of them.

- *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ*
- *... the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us*
- *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ*
- *you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people*

And in the prayer that ends chapter 3 he prays:

'I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [the mountain] and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.'

SLIDE

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Paul has reached the top of the mountain.

Notice in my little picture, I said we did not climb to the top of the mountain but we took the gondola. We were carried there. It cost us no effort. We just sat back and let the cable take the strain. We let the power of the motor get us to the top. It was grace that got us there. And that is exactly what the first three chapters of Ephesians are about. They are all about God has done, is doing and will do for us. It is he who through his grace has made us his adopted sons, citizens of his kingdom. It is God, not we ourselves, who demolished the wall that separates us from Himself. As Paul writes in chapter 2

‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast because we are God’s handiwork’

But this is where the structure of the book changes and the direction changes. So far the focus has been on God and his action and initiative, now Paul says in effect.

Because of all that I have just told you, because of all that God has done for you in Christ, this is how you should respond, his is how you should lead your life, this is how you should walk the talk.

God did not take us to the mountain top so that we could stay there and enjoy the view for ever and a day. No more did Jesus stay on the mountain when he was transfigured but went back down to meet the people and the challenges and needs that came with that.

Matthew Henry, that great 18th century writer on the Bible, writing of this passage puts it this way:

‘In what has gone before, we have heard of Christian privileges, which are the matter of our comfort. In what follows we shall hear of Christian duties, and what the Lord our God requires of us in consideration of such privileges as he has given to us.’

In the first three chapters of Ephesians I reckon there is only one instances of when we are encouraged to do something and that is in chapter 2 when we are told to ‘remember’.

But in Chapters 4-6, I counted at least 27 instances of when we are told to do something or not to do something. This is where our part in the working out of our salvation comes in.

So now let us start our descent and of course have started it a bit late because half my time has gone! But there we are.

In the time left I want to focus on the opening couple of verses and the closing couple of verses so I am aware that I am by-passing a big chunk of this chapter – but I can only cover so much in 40 minutes!

The opening verse says:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling you have received.



To paraphrase: Here am I Paul, confined to this Roman not knowing when I will be put on trial and what the consequences and I urge you, I implore you, I beg you, I beseech you. That is the force of the Greek word *parakaleo* translated here as 'urge' I command you to walk the talk, to live your life in such a way that it measures up to your status and calling as a child of God.

If Chapters 1-3 is our talk, our doctrine, our theology then chapters 4-6 is about our walk and how we should live out our calling as a Christian. Usually this verse is translated 'live a life worthy' but the Greek word is *'peripateo'* from which we get 'peripatetic'. So we find Paul dictating *'parakaleo peripateo'* I urge you to walk.

And what do you need to walk easily. Well you need two good legs, the one balancing the other. You take a step forward with one leg and then you take another step forward with the other leg, switching from one to the other.

In our understanding of the Christian faith we often have to walk on at least two legs and to hold things in tension and balance – sometimes things which seem contradictory or at odds with one another. Let me give you some examples.

- Faith and Good works
- God's sovereignty and humanity's free will
- Suffering and triumph
- Death and resurrection
- God's power and our efforts
- Grace and truth
- In the world but not of the world
- You can perhaps add some more of your own.

And what does this life look like which is worthy of the Lord. What are the characteristics of this walk back down the mountain into the affairs of this life, into the village and the town, into our relationships in our family, our street, our workplace and our church.

Well they are exceptionally easy to understand – not so easy to live out, but then walking long distances requires effort and persistence and stamina. And the Christian walk is a long distance walk. .



It is not a short walk (unless of course you are converted just before your death as some have been). Much less is it a sit in an armchair or even a sit in a blue upholstered chair in All Saints Church.

And like any long walk over open terrain, you need the right clothes and the right foot wear. Flip flops and flimsy clothing are not right. This is where we come to our wardrobe picture.



Paul who in his writings uses many metaphors or pictures to help us understand our Christian faith uses the idea of clothes. He says that when we speak and act in ways that are not Christ-like, it is as if we are wearing dirty or cheap or unseemly clothes and when we speak and act in a Christ-like way, we are wearing our Sunday-best clothes (not that is so much of a thing these days) or the clothes we would wear to a wedding or a job interview or any special occasion.

So in verse 22 we read in the J B Phillips paraphrase of this passage:

No, what you were taught was to fling off the dirty clothes of the old way of living, which were rotted through and through with lust's illusions, and to put on the clean fresh clothes of the new life which was made by God's design for righteousness and the holiness which is no illusion.

So I wonder what clothes you have in the wardrobe and chest of drawers of your heart and life.

Paul details those clothes or characteristics or habits which are like dirty clothes and which should not be worn by Christians:



- Speaking lies and falsehood or slandering - whenever I read this, I always think of that classic line from the film Bambi spoken by Thumper the rabbit, who had been told that morning by his father: *'if you can't say something nice, don't say nothin at all'*
- Holding onto your anger and rage even after the sun has gone down ie going to bed angry with someone and waking up still angry with them
- Stealing
- Unwholesome talk –
- Bitterness – refusing to forgive
- Malice
- Brawling

Then of course the clothes that we should put on are their opposites:



Verses 1 - 3:

- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience
- Forbearance of other people's failings
- Love
- A spirit of unity

Verse 15

- Speaking the truth – but in love if what we have to say is challenging

Verses 25 -28

- Speaking truthfully to our neighbours (there it is again)
- Working and doing useful things, not lazing about or riding passenger on the state and in the church. Why so that we 'may have something to share with those in need'. That goes for our money, our possessions and whatever other resources we have

Verses 29 – 32

- Wholesome talk which is helpful for building others up and benefit those who are listening to us

- Kindness
- Compassion
- Forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you. It's a source of amazement to me how many Christians who will often say the Lord's prayer in church or at home refuse to forgive those who have wronged them. They are holding onto real or imagined wrongs done to them. But then I think, well you may be OK in that department Thomas but think about some of those things that you wouldn't be too thrilled about if everyone knew them

You know there are many things in the Christian faith that are hard to grasp. Yesterday a conference was held on some of those hard questions. But even in the wonderful first three chapters of Ephesians, we might be saying to ourselves "*I don't get that or what does that really mean?*" but these directions from Paul don't require A-levels or a degree in theology to understand do they.

It's not hard to understand "*don't let the sun go down on your anger*" is it? Mind you it may not be so easy to do. Being kind and compassionate does not require 7 years of medical training. Not stealing but rather working hard and being generous with what you have earned can be understood by anyone and everyone. Wouldn't our country be so much richer and prosperous if everyone practised those things?

I don't know what the Day of Judgement will look like (probably not like this)



but I think the parable of the Sheep and the Goats gives us a good idea. The judge didn't ask the sheep and goats what their academic credentials were or whether their Christian doctrine was 100% sound. We will be asked about how we lived and lead our lives not about what we knew and what we believed. they talked. In other words, how we walked not how we talked.

It is probably the case that more people are drawn to Christ through the example of people's lives than they are by sermons and arguments. And the converse, sadly is true. More people are put off the Christian faith by the lives they see of Christians and the church, than by the beliefs of Christians. Mahatma Ghandi is supposed to have said: '*If it weren't for Christians, I'd be a Christian.*'

In Bunyan's classic book 'Pilgrim's Progress' which is no longer read. There is an apparent Christian whose name is Talkative. This is what Christian says about him:

He is known of all that are acquainted with him, by the name of Talkative in Prating Row; and notwithstanding his fine tongue, he is but a sorry fellow. This man is for any company, and for

any talk; as he talks now with you, so will he talk when he is on the ale-bench; and the more drink he has in his crown, the more of these things he has in his mouth; religion has no place in his heart, or house, or conversation; all he has lies in his tongue, and his religion is, to make a noise therewith. He talks of prayer, of repentance, of faith, and of the new birth; but he knows but only to talk of them. Thus say the common people that know him, A saint abroad, and a devil at home.

Well there have been a few of those: “A saint in public but a devil at home” Let us not be like that. Let us not be those who talk the talk but do not walk the walk, following in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ, even as we stumble and trip.

So to conclude: given all that God has done for us and is doing for us and will do for us, let us go on putting off those habits and characteristics which would never be seen on Jesus and let us go on putting on humility, kindness truthfulness, compassion, hard work, patience, forbearance, gentleness.

In doing that we will be truly becoming more and more the body of Christ. We will be a transformed people not a conformed people. We will be lights to the world and not a damp squib to the world. We will be as verse 24 *like God in true righteousness and holiness*’.