



“O Church, Arise”

Ephesians 4:1-16

May 16, 2021

This week we begin a new series that I am titling, *O Church, Arise*, as we seek health, vigor, and renewal, not only for the church, but for our church to the glory of God.

I wonder how many of you would agree with me that the last fourteen months have been very, very, very, very difficult. Maybe the only point of this agreement is whether I put enough of the word *very* in front of the word *difficult*. It has been a hard stretch of time, has it not?

Let me just restate some of the obvious things that we have been through over the past year plus. Last year at this time in May 2020, it was like the whole world was shut down. Pretty much everything was closed because of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Businesses were closed. Barber shops were closed. Nail salons were closed. Theaters were closed. Theme parks were closed. Closed. Closed. Closed. Closed. So many things were closed.

So many of us experienced so much loss. Some people lost work. Some people lost businesses. Some people lost loved ones. I think all of us lost a sense of normalcy and a sense of well-being in the midst of all of the things that were going on, and it was just wearing down on us. In many cases I think it still is.

When we think about some of the crises that our nation has been through in the last century, what occurs to me is that some of them actually served to bring the people of this nation together. The last great crises that is impressed upon my heart is 9/11/2001, when terrorists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center.

I remember how stunned we all were but if my recollection of how that season of time was is correct, the people of this nation actually came together at that time. There was the raising up of patriotism and people all around got active together.

However, over the last fourteen months with Covid-19, I would say that it has been the exact opposite. Instead of coming together, people have been pulled apart, particularly with the varied perspectives on how to handle it all.

On one side, we have people saying, Yes, this disease is serious business. But shutting down the economy is folly and we are just going to do ourselves even more harm with this. Then we have people on the other side saying, Yes, shutting things down is going to have some serious effects, but we stand to lose so many lives if we don't.

It is not just that these perspectives were held by different people, it is that these perspectives have been held with passion. And it has come into the church. Is that true, or is it true? Those are your two options.

Many in the church with the quarantine and stay at home orders that have taken place say absolutely not. Their perspective is no! Faith, not fear. We meet when we want and where we want and that is final.

Meanwhile, we have others who say, Wait a minute, the Word of God is not chained. The Word of God is being spread. Fellowship is still happening, and we have to be good neighbors and do our part to stop the spread of this disease.

Here we have a couple of very valid perspectives in my way of thinking. And we have both perspectives among families of believers not just merely being held, but being held with energy and with fervency. I don't if it has had the sense of wearing everybody down, but I know that many church leaders have been worn down.

So we have had the sense where this issue is wearing on and on. Just a couple of months into this all, when everything seemed to be just as bad as it could possibly be, things got worse with the tragic deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmad Arbury, and Goerge Floyd.

The issue of racism was brought straight to the forefront of the American people. Once again, we have these perspectives so passionately and energetically held. We even saw riots that occurred all across the landscape of the Unites States of America.

So just as we were worn down by one thing, suddenly we were getting worn down by something else. But was that all? Does anybody recall that there was a presidential election? Was that like a very polite presidential election between the candidates and between the people who supported them?

Intensity. Intensity. Intensity! I am only forty-seven-years-old, but that was the most intense election that I can remember in recent history. I think that was probably the most intense election in American history, although I am not a graduate of any American History program in any university.

However, it was an intense election that was contested for months, and which led to the actual breeching of the United States Capital Building. Wow! I know that there are so many different people wanting to explain these things in so many different ways, but what I want to bring to your attention right now is that it has been a hard, hard season.

There have been differences of passionately held perspectives all across the states and in local churches too. In the midst of all these things, I think that the enemy named Satan has been having a hay-day as people in the church are becoming furious in their discussions about these things with one another.

There is an enemy. His name is Satan. One of his chief strategies is to take our eyes off King Christ the Living Lord and to sow seeds of discord among the people of God. There is an enemy and he wears people down with conflict and with anxiety, so that even people who know the Lord can feel so worn out by it all.

In a time such as this, brothers and sisters, how badly we need to keep our eyes lifted up on the God of our salvation. How badly we need to keep our perspective on Christ and the unifying power of His shed blood. And how badly we need at a juncture such as this to have a clear, fresh vision of the local church, of the very body of Christ on earth, of the people of God, serving His Great Name together.

We need to lift up our eyes upon Him and learn from Him all the things that He is calling us to be that we might rise up with continued and ongoing energy supplied by Him to serve the Everlasting Kingdom in a world that is fallen in sin.

We are now going into a series into weeks ahead, into the summer time, and we are going to call this series, *O Church, Arise*. This is named after a modern hymn that I have grown to love. I will be honest with you and let you know that in recent weeks along my Facebook feed I have seen multiple church conferences that have been titled, *O Church, Arise*.

I saw that title and I remembered the song and it just registers with me and I pray that it registers with all of us as we seek renewal and reinvigoration in the Lord, with a fresh perspective of all that God is calling us to be and empowering us to in a world that is afflicted with sin and worn out with anxiety. We have a message of great, great living hope that there is salvation from sin and everlasting life, and the Lord is calling us to advance this, and He is calling us to do this together.

I wonder how many of you recall that we just finished a series in the Gospel of Luke. Sometimes I struggle to tell you the details of what I preached on two weeks ago! But we just culminated our series in Luke. Luke Chapter 24 opened up with Christ in the grave. But in the grave He did not remain because the Gospel of Luke culminates with the resurrection of King Jesus and His ascension up on high.

Jesus was in the grave, but up from the grave He arose. After forty days of interacting with His disciples, up from the earth He arose as He was lifted up high by the power of God into the heavens of Heaven. It is a glorious picture that the Gospel of Luke concluded with, as we see the majesty of the Messiah.

However, brothers and sisters, let me bring the reminder that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in us, the local church. We are raised up in the life of God. Up from spiritual death, we in Christ have arose by the grace of God. Ephesians Chapters 1 and 2 lays out this glorious salvation.

Those of you who have come to faith in Jesus, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, but God has made you alive in Christ. It is by grace that you have been saved. You have been lifted up in new life in Christ, and He empowers you to serve Him in this world that is fallen and filled

with darkness and confusion and pain and sin. And we are called to be the very body of Christ here on this earth.

We are going to spend some time going into the months ahead, looking at the glory and the majesty of all that God calls us to be and empowers us to be as His church. I am praying that we as a church will rise up by God's grace into the full stature of all that the Lord calls us to be.

Into the weeks and months ahead, we are going to be making several stops in the ancient world of the early church; in the times of antiquity where the life of God was so active, knowing that that same life is active among us as well.

We are going to visit some of those churches where the doctrine of the church was taught. We are going to spend some time in Corinth in the time ahead of us. That was a kind of troubled church, but they had the power of the Holy Spirit that was lifting them to a higher plane.

We are going to spend some time with some of the wonderful churches of Macedonia, Philippi, and Thessalonica and see how they were being lifted up by the power of God to be the church together.

This morning and into the weeks ahead we are going to start in the city of Ephesus. Before we go into the text this morning, I want to remind you that in that city God was bringing believing Jews and Gentiles together as one unified man in Christ. Into the church, they were being joined with all of their vast cultural differences, and even with their background of mutual hostility.

Back in those days there was open racial antagonism. The Jews could not stand the Gentiles, and many of the Gentiles could not stand the Jews. And here we have Christ bringing Jews and Gentiles together, joined as one body in Christ where they would dwell together serving Him in unity.

If you look at the book of Ephesians, the first, second and into Chapter Three you will see that they are highly doctrinal, talking about the Doctrine of Salvation—that we are saved by grace, the glorious and preordained plan of God.

Then in Chapter 4, it becomes rich teaching about the glory of Christ in the local church. I think that there might have been something within many of those Jews and Gentiles that was thinking, Okay, there are too many differences and disagreements that it might be less complicated if the Jews met in the Hall of Tyrannus at 9:00 AM and the Gentiles met at 10:30 AM. But Paul said no! That is not how it is going to work.

And here in Ephesians Chapter 4 and Verses 1 through 16, we have a rich section of ecclesiology where through Paul the Lord was calling those people and all of us to unity and to worship and to ministry and to activity. All together in Christ in the common bond of our salvation.

I want to start by reading through this text. Understand that Paul in his writings, he had the pension to just burst forth into long movements of theological doxology. Rich with theology. But stirred with worship.

So what we read here is an outpouring of this and it is one of the most beautiful portraits of the church that we have in Scripture, among many, many others. Let's begin by reading through Ephesians Chapter 4, starting in Verse 1. Paul's passionate plea:

¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

⁹(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

So this is one rich and dense portion of biblical teaching. This is Paul's passionate plea to the local church. It begins with Paul urging and appealing from the heart to the people of God there in that First Century world to Jews and Gentiles to come together in Christ.

It issues forth into our day as well. It remains every bit the will of the Lord in Southern California in 2021 as it was in Ephesus in the year that this was written, whatever our perspectives on Covid regulations might be.

All of that fades into the union that we have in Christ. That is the prominent thing. In all these things, we must keep our eyes on Jesus and be raised up as one body into the full stature of Him as we serve Him in a world that desperately needs His salvation.

In this portion of Scripture, I am seeing three things that come off the page. There is a call to unity in the body of Christ. There is a call to worship that is in this text. And we need to rise up in that unity and we need to rise up in that worship. There is also a call to maturity that is here, and we need to rise up in that mature manhood that is defined for us here in this text.

We are going to be in those first two points this morning and the third point and passage of Scripture is so relevant and dense that we are going to focus on it next week. So let's begin by taking to heart the call to unity that this portion of Scripture opens up with.

1. Let's rise in unity (4:1-6)

We have read the passage in Verses 1 through 6 and at the very heart of this opening paragraph is the calling we have received. The essence of this passage is at the very center. We need to be:

³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Maintain the unity of the Spirit. It does not tell us to create the unity of the Spirit as though we could produce it by our own efforts. No, it is a supernatural reality that God brings to those who are joined in a common faith in Christ. We don't create that unity of the Spirit, but we maintain it. We are eager to keep in place and to continue what the Holy Spirit is doing among His people and that is unifying them in Christ.

In Verses 4 through 6 of this portion of Scripture, it tells us why we need to pursue this kind of unity because we are joined together as one body, with one spirit, with a common hope. There is a oneness that is there that Paul laid out for all of us in Christ.

It is the reason why we need to pursue this and then Paul told us how to do it when we see what is there in Verse 2. How can there be the sense of harmony among those who might have some differences of perspective on some secondary things? We do it:

²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love

So there are four qualities of graciousness that the Holy Spirit is going to be empowering in us when we are filled with His power and His presence. Humility. Gentleness. Patience. Forbearance.

This passage of Scripture tells us that in the family of God we are going to need to have patience and forbearance with one another? Does that mean that we are going to agree upon everything? I think the implication is that it we are not; that we won't.

When we see those four graciousness qualities that are laid out for us, we see the way that we are to conduct ourselves as we communicate on various issues in our time. Those qualities that we see listed here, that is the character with which we discuss the issue of face masks as they apply to the church of God into the time ahead.

That is the character with which we discuss various issues of public policy or public officials. This is how we communicate with one another even when there are personal grievances, where it moves from just being irritating toward one another to actually having moments where one has sinned against another.

By the Spirit of God, in the midst of the complexities that we deal with, we need to have this kind of humility and gentleness by the command and the empowerment of the Lord. Humility. The sense of low-mindedness that realizes that we should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought.

I might not be seeing this thing from every angle clearly, and I might not be as smart as I think I am on these various issues. There's got to be humility and gentleness. The practice of constraint. It is not weakness. In fact, it is the exact opposite because it is the power of God applied to various impulses within our flesh to be harsh.

We are to practice gentleness. Pastor Paul Dirks was our pastor through the 90s. I remember once and maybe several times he said, As you are talking with people on things that are kind of sticky and there are some disagreements, you need to put an imaginary sign around them that says, Fragile. Handle with care.

Gentleness! By the order of the Lord. Brothers and sisters, this is such a manifestation of the power of the Spirit of God among us. This is the Spirit of God as He fills our lives subduing some of the inclinations that remain with the lingering sin within us.

Whenever you have a disagreement with somebody on a particular issue, your mind is going to become very, very active. You are going start rehearsing all these scenarios in your mind. These episodes are going to play out. As you think about the conversations that may happen, your mind is going conjure up some real dingers with which you can ding that person with.

Hopefully they are not daggers. Hopefully you are not meaning to do harm with your brothers and sisters, although we are capable of that too, and we must come under the power of the Spirit. But sometimes we just want to ring somebodies bell and we get some choice nuggets where we can just give it to them.

Do you know what you need to do? Do you know what I need to do with those dingers? Put them to death! Put those dingers to death and say, Lord, there are so many robust discussions that are happening on this topic in the body of Christ and I need for You to subdue some things in me.

Then with a spirit of gentleness come close to that brother or sisters and to say, Hey I have a concerns and I think we should talk about it. I care for you. I am concerned for what's going on in your life. We need to talk this thing though. Because if we come to others firing, fury tends to spark fury in return. Whereas a gentle answer turns away wrath.

This is the call of the Lord among people who are united in the essentials of the faith—one Lord. One hope. One faith. This is how we discuss things of the age that can become very, very complex. We need to say, Lord, keep me in check. As we talk about these things into the months ahead, we will have another sermon on this little instrument that dwells behind our teeth. The fleshy tongue!

Brothers and sisters, if we are going to rise up as a church according to the vision that God has for us, we do so as people who are bold in the doctrines of the faith and who speak forth with love and vital concern for the people that we are close to.

This takes a work of the Holy Spirit in us. We must come before the Spirit and say, Lord, I am pretty good at failing at this. If not actually verbally in front of the person, definitely in my thinking. I need for You to help me to have this kind of graciousness.

Let's rise up in unity, seeing how this kind of character is that which nurtures it and preserves it. Early in Ephesians Chapter 4, we have the call to unity in the body of Christ. Then as we move forward in our section this morning, we see that Paul makes a transition and talks about activity.

Paul goes from unity to activity. Not only do we need to be one body in Christ, but we need to be an active body in Christ with every body doing their part. But as we move from the one to the next, a moment of worship from the Apostle Paul bridges the two.

This is so important because we are a unified church as we worship, as we have a lofty view of King Christ together. That is how we are unified and that is how we rise up in worship; with worship for the King filling our hearts and souls.

2. Let's rise with worship (4:7-10)

This moment of worship from the Apostle Paul comes to us as he tells us about the ongoing grace of God in the lives of Christians. As we have already mentioned, Ephesians Chapters 1 and 2 emphasizes that as a follower of Jesus, you have been saved by grace and by grace alone, and not by works.

As if you could ever do enough to measure up to a moral code. Everything is tainted by sin. We are saved by grace. Christ atoned for sin and gives us His righteousness. Saved by grace but that is not all of the grace for the Christian life.

Not only are we saved by grace, but we are also gifted by grace. That grace continues to flow from God who provides spiritual gifts. They are endowments and abilities given to believers to strengthen the church.

However, informing us of these gifts, Paul tells us about the spectacular ways in which these gifts were given. What we have now in this next section is one of these examples of how the Apostle Paul had the ability to write himself into these spontaneous moments of praise to the Lord.

Some preachers preach themselves happy and worshipful. I think Paul would write himself happy and worshipful as he was thinking about the things of God. I think we have something of that here as we see what is next. Verse 7:

⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

⁸Therefore it says,

**“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”**

⁹(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

What lofty thoughts of Christ were filling this man’s mind and heart and, therefore, also his pen as he depicted for us the incarnation of Jesus, the ascension of Jesus, and then the distribution of spiritual gifts.

Understand what is going in what we just read. Let me speak forth this old adage: what goes up, must come down! That is an expression of the law of gravity. What goes up, must come down. But with the Son of God, it was the exact reversal of that statement.

With Christ, what came down, then went back up—way up. Up. Up. Up. Up with this astonishing picture of Him being absolutely elevated to the point that this One, Christ, fills all things. What truth was filling this man’s heart! It is awesome!

When it says the He descended to the lower region, that assumes the pre-existence of the One who descended down. It is the pre-existent, eternal, divine Son of God who came down from Heaven to earth. He went down, down, down in incarnation. Down. Down. Down and through the birth canal of a virgin daughter of Israel.

Down. Down. Down from Heaven to earth. Robed in human flesh to live a life of humble service. Down. Down. Down from Heaven to earth to the cross where He died. Down He went, not simply to the cross where He died, but dying a certain and very unique kind of death. Dying a death bearing the sins of His people upon Him, so that in Scripture it even says that He became sin for us.

Down. Down. Down He came to the point where He was placed in the grave, but the grave did not contain Him. We have read all about this recently haven’t we? From the grave, up, up, up he arose. Way up! He ascended in a moment of great coronation to the heavens.

Now, as the Conquering King, He fills the universe with His presence. I don’t know how to wrap my mind around that except to say that that is an awesome reality. He is lifted up on high, filling everything as He is lavishing His church with gifts to empower them in the life that He calls them to. What a picture of Jesus!

This kind of view of Christ, the worship, thinking, and contemplation that Christ produces within His church, is how we rise up. This is what it is all about. Brothers and sisters, it is all about Jesus. He is our one Lord. If we rise up, we do so with the buoyancy that comes with exalted thoughts about King Christ our Lord and our Savior.

This Jesus is revealed all throughout the pages of Scripture. Remember the Emmaus Road experience? What did Jesus teach those two disciples as they were going away from the place of

the resurrection? Jesus tracked them down and taught them all that was spoken of about the Christ in the Old Testament.

And Paul found another one of those areas which he quoted here in this text. In Psalm 68, which Paul quoted, God is pictured as marching in triumph before all of Israel after the Exodus. He has conquered the enslaving Egyptian foe and when He comes to Sanai, the earth is shaking under His feet.

Then God is poetically described as ascending Mt. Sanai with His enemies as captives as He is receiving gifts from men. That is my attempt to summarize what we see in Psalm 68. Now here, Paul took that in and he had freedom in the Spirit to apply this to the New Testament vision of Christ, and slightly adjust the language accordingly.

Christ is picture after the atonement and resurrection, now the earth shakes under His feet. He has conquered the enslaving foe of sin. He has conquered demonic entities and He is depicted as ascending to Heaven.

Now He is giving gifts to men, empowering them for service, providing for them, so that the church of God may rise up as one new joined, mature man in Christ. What a reversal! Christ is known for His reversals, the reversals that He brings for His people.

In the atonement, in justification, there was an exchange that took place. Jesus took our sin and He provides us with His righteousness as a gift. Here we see another one of those exchanges that Jesus brings.

He conquers the sin that captivated us and now He empowers us with gifts so that the weak can be strong in the Lord. And the church is to be a combination of a whole bunch of men and women, boys and girls, who are growing in the strength of the Lord.

Finally, we are going to read the last point as a precursor to what we will be digging into deeper next week. We are to rise up with worship, knowing that Christ is bringing us to maturity in the faith together.

3. Let's rise to maturity (4:11-16)

This is what it says in Verses 11 through 16:

¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by

every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Here in this text we are going to see this rich, rich call to maturity that Christ empowers in churches like ours. We are to be a church robust in doctrine. We are to be a church active in ministry and we are to be a church saturated with the loving kindness of the Lord.

That is what is described in this text with all kinds of cool imagery that I am so excited to share next week, because I knew I would not have enough time this week. We are going to talk about ocean waves next week. I don't if you are excited about that, but I sure am. There are wonderful things to see as we see this picture of the church rising up in maturity in the Lord.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.