

I don't know about you, but I'm thoroughly enjoying the Olympics that are currently going on. I've always enjoyed the Olympics. In 2012, when they were in London, I took a two-week holiday, and went to as many events as I could. One virtually every day. We were actually in the stadium on what the Brits call Super Saturday, when we won three track and field gold medals in an hour. That was quite a memory. And there was another time when the time difference was a bit more friendly than between us and Tokyo, when I spent many hours studying the form of the British athletes. And I constructed a timetable, which meant that I was able to see virtually every British medal won live.

I really enjoyed that one. That was great. Well, that was pointed out that year that we won most of our medals sitting down. We seem to specialize in events that were done while seated, like horse riding, canoeing, rowing, sailing, and cycling. This year's viewing has been quite difficult because I'm in America. And NBC, the Olympic channel, seems to only focus on American athletes, and I'm not interested. I want to know how the Brits are doing. One night, I had to watch an American water polo team play. This was doubly bad, because not only were there no Brits involved, but also I had to endure the world's most boring spectator sport.

And I've been reminded this Olympics that I'm a lonely Brit living amongst a foreign people, lovely people, but not Brits. And I was thinking about this experience when looking at that reading from Ephesians. And there are things in that passage aimed at individuals. But St. Paul is most concerned with how, as individuals, we relate to those around us, particularly in the community of the church. It's those relationships with those around that make a real difference, which are of particular interest to St. Paul. John Donne said, "No man or woman is an island." And St. Paul knew that very well, which is why much of his teaching is addressed to individuals for them to work on individually.

But that's always in the context of how that life that we're called to, needs to be lived out in a

corporate and community context. Let me be more specific. Our passage begins with St. Paul begging his readers to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. We might say that someone has a particular vocation or a job. But Paul's not talking about that here. He's going much deeper. We see that in the next sentence, he says, "You were called to the one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism." St. Paul understood that the most basic call on our lives is the call for each of us individually to respond to the grace of God made known in Christ Jesus.

God's call on each of us is to be his child, to walk his ways. A way characterized by humility, gentleness, and patience. To speak of call in this way is to speak of how our lives are orientated, which way we're heading. St. Paul says elsewhere, "I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." The call on us is a heavenly call. It's a call to live our lives in the light of eternity, to be orientated towards heaven. We know that this world is not all that there is. We're looking towards God's new kingdom, to follow the one who has gone before us, who has blazed a trail from this world to the next. We are called to walk his way.

This individual heavenly call that we all have is worked out in the context of community. We see how Paul goes straight on to say, that we are to "bear with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." He's not saying here that we're to bear one another's burdens. That's the message that we all need to hear, but that isn't what's being said here. He's saying we bear with one another. A particularly timely message for today. Bearing with one another isn't the same as be nice to one another. It certainly isn't the same as be sure to agree with one another. A more literal translation would be, put up with one another.

We all need at this time to be working hard, to be putting up with one another. Take the new guidance that's come out about masks that we'll be following in church this Sunday. Some of us think

that this is a gross invasion of our liberty and nonsense. Others think that it doesn't go nearly far enough, and we should be issuing mandatory vaccines. We're all feeling very different about this pandemic. And after 18 months of isolation, we're all a bit frenzied and frazzled. Putting up with one another is not easy in any context, certainly this context, but it's essential. We see this dynamic, the relationship between the individual and the community reappearing later in the passage.

Paul talks about gifts. St. Paul is convinced that God gives gifts to all his people. He mentions some gifts here. And in other passages, he mentions other gifts. In Romans, he says, "We have gifts that differ according to the grace that has been given to us. Prophecy, teaching, giving, leading, compassion." But Paul's always clear, that these gifts are not given for the glorification of the individual. They are for the benefit of the church community, or to use his phrase, "The building up of the body of Christ." Paul often talks as he does here about the church as a body, with every Christian having a part to play.

He says this, "But 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 and building itself up in love." To use an illustration that's particularly appropriate here in San Diego, St. Paul thinks that the church is not like a cruise ship with a whole bunch of passengers being waited on by the staff. No. The church, the body of Christ is much more like a warship, a battleship, where everybody on board has a part to play. That's the vision that St. Paul has in mind when he talks about every part working properly.

St. Paul has a very high view of the church. He'd say we're not just a group of like-minded people who come together every Sunday morning, because we all liked the music or whatever. No. We are the body of Christ looking to come to the full unity of faith, to maturity, to the full stature of Christ.

We're all called. Each of us individually is called to respond to the grace that God has shown us in Jesus Christ. And we're called together to grow together as one, as the body of Christ. We're to live out our calling in the context and fellowship of the church. Amen.