

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, November 16, 2025

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Let's take a deep breath in together and breathe it out slowly.

Take another deep breath in. And breathe it out slowly.

And breathe in God's mercies. And breathe out God's mercies to others.

One more deep breath in of God's mercies. and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. And so we pray that you would dwell within us and around us in these moments, that you would quiet us, that we might hear your word for us this day, and that in hearing your word, we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Friends, our scripture lesson this morning comes to us from Ephesians. We're in the fourth chapter. We're going to read verses 1- 7 and then 11- 16 together. You can follow along in your pew Bible or just listen for God's word to each of us and indeed to God's church. This is Paul speaking to the church in Ephesus.

*Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility and gentleness and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the spirit with the peace that ties you together. You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. God has given his grace to each one of us, measured out by the gift that is given by Christ. God gave some gifts to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, some teachers. His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults, to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ. As a result, we aren't supposed to be infants any longer, who can be tossed and blown around by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and the tricks people play to deliberately mislead others. Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let's grow in every way into Christ who is the head. The whole body grows from him as it is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments. The body makes itself grow in that it builds itself up with love as each one does its part.*

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

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So, a couple weeks ago, I got tricked that winter was here. Okay. I got tricked because my radiators turned on. They're set to the same temperature all year round. And so when it hits and they warm up, I know the season has changed, right? And when that happens, what I do is I go to one of my closets and I take a small group of what I might call summer only clothing, right? And I put it into a guest closet. And I grab some winter clothing, and I put it into my closet, right? The one I use every day. And, something about this ritual for me has been really meaningful, specifically this year because I got to travel a lot. I like to do a lot of stuff outside. It's kind of the way in which I feel nourished by God. One of the things I like to do is I like to golf, right? Some people think golf is a waste of a couple hours. I totally agree with that sometimes. But I thoroughly enjoy being outside. It's something I did with my grandfather. It's something that he did with my mother when she was a child. It's this thing that's an important, I'm not sure I'd call it a sport, maybe a game. Okay. And I enjoy it. And so when I take those...a couple of...those shirts or clothing, they're like these polo shirts, right? And I was paying particular attention a couple weeks ago when I did that to these little...these little images on the chest of the shirt, right? Each different club has a different image. Okay. And we have a number of courses around our city and they have these little images, right? As I was doing it this time, I put them away and I thought, "Oh, that image is from a course in Chicago, Illinois." Right? And, it started bringing back some memories. I went with my buddy Kyle to Chicago in the midst of sabbatical, and it made me think about the weather, what it was like for those couple days, the time that we spent together, the meals that we shared together, how terrible I played at golf that couple days, right? But it recollected within me some sort of memory. Images have power, right? Images have power. The same thing happened kind of over and over again as I'm putting these clothes away. and it reminded me that images can draw from within us recollections of joy but also of pain, right? Of inclusion and exclusion? Images can really change the way we understand ourselves or even our neighbors out in the world. I thought about that this week, specifically, because I was thinking about this passage from Ephesians.

This is not the first place that Paul introduces to us a really significant image, but it's a place that we have this week. Maybe y'all caught it. There's an image that he introduces to the people in Ephesus of the body. When...if I was to ask you what the most significant image of the Christian faith is, the one that endures, the one that often if we had a shirt to wear or a flag to fly, it would be on it, what would be your response? What is the chief image of the Christian faith? We don't have one here in this space except for we're quite literally shaped like it. Most would say the cross. Yeah. Most will say that the cross is the defining image of our faith, and it's an image that elicits all sorts of different responses. Right? It is an image that represents freedom but also pain. It represents imperial power versus what we know to be triumphant power. Right? And the cross is for many the key image of our Christian faith. And therefore it might interest you that in Paul's

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writings, the majority of our New Testament text, he refers to the cross 10...about 10 times, right? It's an important image for him. He refers to the body, soma, he refers to it about a hundred times in his writings. If Paul was to give us an image that we were to hold on to that would define our faith, it would not be the cross, although the cross is important. It would be something that's probably more difficult for us to conceptualize, but it would be a body. He calls that body the body of Christ.

He talks about it here in Ephesians, which is really interesting because the first time he introduces this image in scripture is in First Corinthians. Okay? And in that text he talks about how each of the members of the body are ordered in such a way as to complement each other. He talks about ears and eyes and feet and hands. Talks about how the body can't be the body unless there is this unique collection of all the different parts to make it what it is. We find it in First Corinthians, an epistle he wrote to the church in Corinth. And most historians would tell us that he wrote that letter while in Ephesus. While being among those that we call the Ephesians, he begins to conjure up by God's spirit this different sort of image of the body. Of course, the cross is where grace begins, but the body is where grace is lived out in the world. And so he tells the Corinthians based on what he's seeing, what I like to imagine are the Ephesians kind of working in all sorts of different but unique ways, he gives us this image.

I wonder how our faith would be different if the cross had not taken primary place as the key image of the Christian faith. And instead it was something as beautiful and as complex as the body, ears and eyes, feet and hands.

Paul lifts up this image to the church in Ephesus for, I believe, at least two reasons. Okay. First, as he does through the church in Corinth, he wants the people to know those who are struggling to figure out what it means to love and follow Jesus Christ. He wants the people to know that each of them is uniquely equipped to do the work of Christ in the world. Uniquely equipped. He gives off this laundry list of different things they can be. They can preach. They can teach. They can serve. They can care. They can pray. Right? Each of them together living into the uniqueness of their call. They together will make the body. Can't all be ears or how would they see? The whole body was an eye, where would the sense of smell be? He says it to the church in Corinth. Okay. He wants them to know that each of them, however unique they are, have a particular gifting of the Holy Spirit of God to serve God in the world. Okay, that's, I believe, the first reason why he tells them about this image, why he introduces it to them. The second reason is a little bit more sinister. Okay. The second reason is because Paul knows that there will be other narratives in their world, the world of the Ephesians, that will continually tell them over and over and over again that they are distinct from one another, that they are separated from one another,

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that there are some who ought to be welcomed and others that deserve to be outcast. that there are some who are clean and others who are unclean, right? That there are some who are honorable and others that don't hold honor in the community. He knows that there will be images and narratives outside of the community of faith that will tear at them to believe that they are separate from one another. This is what I think he speaks of when he uses this really pointed language. We're not supposed to be infants anymore. Tossed and blown around. Tossed to and fro by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and the tricks that people play to deliberately mislead us.

This idea that out in the world—we're one thing here but outside we're somehow separated from each other. He wants them to know they have unique gifts, and he wants them to know that in Christ there is a oneness. There is a oneness that has been achieved, that cannot be undone.

This becomes really important for us right now. A month from today at 7:30, there will be a stage across the front here. It was built many years ago. It'll stretch this away as well. And this area will be filled with musicians. And we'll celebrate our third annual Festival Christmas, which is our Christmas concert. We want you to be here, by the way, no RSVP. Bring a friend. Okay. But I'll get to do something I love, I've fallen in love with the last couple years. I'll get to come in here a little bit early. If you want to get here early, you can, too. And I'll get to see the instrumentalist here, and I'll sit probably back where Lucy is this morning, right? And I'll get to hear them as uh they make a racket tuning their instruments. Right? Those who attend the symphony, you hear this often as well. Instruments trying to find their balance before they join together. And then at about 7:30, Gary will be standing right about there ready to conduct. And our choir and these musicians, they will be focused on him, and he will draw up his hands, and as if as a gift from above, music will begin to flow in this place, right? And I'll get to be sitting maybe where Mary is or maybe up there, and I'll get to hold together the two images of kind of the wonky tuning that happens and then the beautiful symphony that draws together, right? Not to mix too many metaphors here, but there's something about the teaching moment that will happen a month from now that I think Paul understands, that the beauty of being the church in the world is going to take the unique sounds and gifts of all of us together, and the better we do that, the more faithfully we do that, the more often we practice the drawing together of these gifts, the more resilient we become to any voice that would speak separation, any voice that would be deceitful and try to tell us that our neighbors don't also belong, that we are somehow different and that those differences are enough for some to be treated in inhumane ways, right? There's something that happens when we draw together as the body of Christ that is powerful and transformational out in the world.

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Here's the thing. You are the people that God has seen fit to sit in the pews of Idlewild Presbyterian Church on November 16th, 2025. You are here for a reason. Each of you has been uniquely gifted in some way to help us to be the church. We, in fact, we actually can't be the church of Jesus Christ without the gifts that God has given to you. Some of you have had a real clear time and season. Some of you have spent 16 years as a treasurer, right? Finances are your thing. They are your gift, right? Others of you have served in More than a Meal and Room in the Inn. That's what you do. Others of you will lead committees. Others of you will help welcome. Others will collect the offering later on this morning. Others will do countless things that aren't seen in this place. Right? But what I know is you're all uniquely equipped by the Holy Spirit of God to help us to be the church right now. and we cannot be the church without you.

It's a gorgeous day. I'm kind of glad that I got tricked into thinking that winter had come. It's going to be in the mid70s this afternoon, sunny. Here's what I'd love for you to do. Eat a ton of food in TK Young. Celebrate Verna. And then at some point later on this afternoon, maybe you're taking your dog or you're walking with your child or a friend or maybe by yourself, I want you to pray a prayer to ask God to reveal to you the unique way that you have been equipped to help us to truly be the body of Christ in the world right now. And then I want you to just be quiet.

These gifts are built into you. They don't have to be dropped upon you. They're already who you are. God's already created you in that way. All we need you to do is by the wisdom and the power of the spirit to discern what they are. Paul chose a particular image to give to the church, and it wasn't one of suffering. It was one of flourishing, one of health, one of connectedness. We indeed are the body of Christ right here and right now. How is it that you have been equipped to help us to be the body more faithfully in this time and in this place?

Let's pray together. Gracious and loving God, some of us know exactly how you've gifted us. Others of us, we've never slowed down enough to ask. Some of us have been so set in our ways of how it is we serve here that we're...we haven't been open to the new way you're calling us to be a part of your body here. What we need, Lord, is your wisdom. What we need, Lord, is your courage. And so we pray, Lord, in the quiet of an afternoon, we pray that you might respond to our prayer, that we might know together how it is you're calling us to serve your body and to be your body here at Idlewild. So gift us not only with time and space for the question, but with courage to live lives in response to the answer. May we trust and may we believe that we are indeed bound together, bound together by your grace and your love that we know at the cross but that we live out as your body, for we ask it in the name of the crucified and the risen one, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

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