

In our scripture read today the Ephesian converts are called to discard their old nature and take on a new one. They were told that living into holiness involves specific kinds of behavior—the type of behaviors that build up relationships and enriches the Christian community.

Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrase of the Bible called *The Message*, has this to say about it:

“What we know about God and what we do for God have a way of getting broken apart in our lives. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians joins together what has been torn apart in our world. He begins with an exuberant exploration of what Christians believe about God, and then, like a surgeon skillfully setting a compound fracture, “sets” this belief in God into our behavior before God so that the bones—belief and behavior—knit together and heal.

Once our attention is called to it, we notice these fractures all over the place. There is hardly a bone in our bodies that has escaped injury, hardly a relationship in town or job, school or church, family or country, that isn’t out of joint or limping in pain. There is much work to be done.

And so, Paul goes to work. He ranges widely from heaven to earth and back again, showing how Jesus is eternally and tirelessly bringing everything and everyone together. He also shows us that in addition to having this work done in and for us, we are participants in this most urgent work.”

Scripture also affirms the diversity of all our individual gifts. Those gifts are collective in nature also...to be used for the good of the whole. The words in Ephesians 4 are “*to equip*

*the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”*

That “equipping”, I think, is not so much about acquiring an entirely new set of skills or accumulating more knowledge. The word equip actually comes from the Greek word “*katartismos*”, which means “*the setting of a bone.*” It is derived from a verb meaning “*to reconcile*”, “*to restore*”, “*to create*”, “*to prepare*”.

Given that, to grow in one’s faith journey might mean to sort of align ourselves with God’s intentions. That is a powerful claim...but is also one of those things that is easier said than done, right?? To align our belief in God with our behavior before God.

How will I know if I am doing that??

Who really fully knows or can fully discern the scope of God’s intentions??

Your own vocations—the unique way that your partnership with God unfolds—may take on many different forms. But God’s power works in and on us, not because we are doing anything great or wonderful or decisive—we are merely tending to our daily lives.

I share with you this story from the New York Times some years ago:

“Bob Fletcher, a former California agricultural inspector who, ignoring the resentment of neighbors, quit his job in the middle of WWII to manage the fruit farms of Japanese families forced to live in internment camps, died on May 23rd

in Sacramento. His death was confirmed by Doris Taketa, who was 12 when Mr. Fletcher agreed to run her family's farm in 1942, the year she and her extended family were relocated. 'He saved us,' she said.

Al Tsukamoto, whose parents arrived in the United States in 1905, approached Mr. Fletcher with a business proposal: would he be willing to manage the farms of 2 family friends, and to pay the taxes and mortgages while they were away?? In return, he could keep the profits.

Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Tsukamoto had not been close, and Mr. Fletcher had no experience growing the farmer's specialty grapes, but he accepted the offer and soon quit his job. For the next 3 years he worked a total of 90 acres on three farms—he had also decided to run Mr. Tsukamoto's farm also. He worked 18 hour days, and lived in the bunkhouse Mr. Tsukamoto had reserved for migrant workers. He paid the bills..and he kept only half of the profits. When the Tsukamotos returned in 1945, they found that Mr. Fletcher had left them money in the bank and that his new wife, Teresa, had cleaned their house in preparation for their return.

Mr. Fletcher's willingness to work the farms was not well received in the town of Florin, where before the war some people had resented the Japanese immigrants for their success. Japanese children in the area were required to attend segregated schools. Mr. Fletcher was unruffled by personal attacks; he felt the Japanese farmers were being mistreated.

“I don’t know about courage,” he said in 2010 as the town was preparing to honor him in a ceremony. “It took a devil of a lot of work.”

We are also called to “lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called” by bearing with one another in love, as Bob Fletcher did. Our whole lives are potentially a partnership in love, a partnership in which God wants to share. To live in that awareness, even for brief and disconnected moments, is to love God in return.

I think one of those moments happened at the Tokyo Olympics when high-jumpers Gianmarco Tamberi of Italy and Mutaz Essa Barshim of Qatar flawlessly jumped the high-jump at 7 feet, 9 1/4th inches. But neither of them could clear the bar at a higher level after the three attempts given in their competition. According to the rules, they could either continue to compete with a jump-off until one man finally triumphed over the other. Or, they could share the gold. “Can we have 2 golds?” Barshim asks the official. Before the official could even finish his response, Barshim reaches out to Tamberi, and they shake hands. Then they hug. Then they run around the field celebrating. The crowd went wild. According to USA Today, the pair met at a competition in Canada in 2010. Since then, they’ve been there for each other through international competitions and even injuries.

These moments matter..

“And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave up Christ’s self for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Love that sacrifices for the good of others. Love that is neither theoretical nor abstract, but love that is the glue, the cement, of community.

Love—it does you good—it is what ‘equips’ us, what knits the bones of our belief and our behavior together.

Thanks be to God!