



# First United Church of Oak Park

## Everyday Faith

Ephesians 4:1-7

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Last week our youth led a service that reminded us that sometimes our faith makes an uproar. It summons up in us courage and commitment, and it can lead us to confront the challenges of our day.

This week we turn our thoughts to a different dimension of faithfulness, one that is more routine and sometimes invisible. Listen again to how Eugene Peterson, the author of *The Message*, interprets our text from Ephesians: “Here’s what I want you to do. . . . I want you to get out there and walk . . . on the road God called you to travel.”<sup>1</sup>

Where does your everyday walk take you? How and where do you spend your days?

My everyday walk starts in my home, which I share with my husband and two cats. Now that our two sons are grown and living in the city, Tony and I live a pretty routine and circumscribed life. We putter around, get things done, straighten things up, cook and share a meal.

Sometimes domestic life propels me out of the house, and I go places that are also pretty routine: the dry cleaners, the grocery store, the garden center. Those places are usually full of strangers, although some of them have familiar faces because I see them repeatedly.

Every once in a while, I get out and about with our children or with friends. Or, I’ll walk the neighborhood to burn off a few calories. I’ll also walk to my computer, where I can check in with friends and distant family members on email and Facebook.

My everyday walk takes me to work, too. My work is punctuated with human interaction, pastoral visits, lots of email, committee meetings. In my old job, I spent about an hour and a half a day sitting in traffic on the Eisenhower expressway. When I was younger, I spent my days in school.

Where does your everyday walk take you? Do you spend your day at school or work? Are you on a sports team? Do you take music lessons or make music with friends? Are you part of a quilting group or other art collective? Do you volunteer? Do you serve on committees? Do you go on protest marches? Will I run into you at the River Forest Jewel?

The Protestant reformers, the folks who 500 years ago broke away from Catholicism and planted the seeds for the churches in which we worship today, were insistent that the primary place that we live out our Christian faith is in the routine, mundane activities of everyday life. You can be a Christian at Hatch, or Beye, or Roosevelt elementary school. You can be a Christian at the high school, or at Chase Bank, or on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. You can be a Christian when you buy or sell groceries. To be a Christian you don’t have to be a priest, or a nun, or a minister. And, being Christian isn’t restricted to the Sundays you show up in church, either. Every moment of every day, wherever we find ourselves, is an opportunity for us to practice our faithfulness.

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, “Ephesians 4,” *The Message*, p. 2130.

That's what the anonymous author of Ephesians is talking about when he tells us to be nice to each other, not to be too full of ourselves, and to work really hard to get along with others.

In my experience, this is much more easily said than done.

I remember an incident that occurred about 40 years ago in an automobile dealership. Several of us had dropped off our cars for servicing, first thing in the morning, and we were standing in line to do all the paperwork. For some reason, it was taking forever. There was a woman in line, a bit in front of me, who began to get a little annoyed. She started to complain out loud. Couldn't the line move a little faster? What was up with this Volkswagen dealership being so rude to its customers and keeping us waiting so long? The woman's complaints got a little louder, and people started looking at her. Then her complaints got even louder, and people began looking away, or examining their fingernails, because it was getting a bit awkward. Whoever she was with tried to calm her down, to no avail. She kept getting more and more expressive. And louder. And more rude and vulgar. Within just a few minutes, something kind of snapped, and the woman got completely hysterical. They had to call the paramedics. It was pretty vivid.

I remember this not only because of its vividness, but also because the woman was saying out loud everything I was feeling inside. I was losing my patience, too. And I was not feeling gentle toward these car dealership people. By the time I finally got to the front of the line, I had very little interest in getting along with whoever was doing the paperwork. I feel like that a lot when I'm in long lines, or when I'm stuck in a traffic jam. If someday you hear on the news about a little old lady who completely lost it because she was stuck on the Eisenhower in a traffic jam, the little old lady might very well be me.

You all may be better Christians than I am, so maybe you will not completely connect with me when I say that I do not always find it easy to be gentle. Patience is a huge challenge for me. When I get frustrated with a bus driver, or the check-out person at the Jewel, or the person who has finally picked up the phone after five minutes of a computer voice asking me to press yet another number, it is hard for me to remember that whoever that person is has had a hard day, too, maybe a harder day than I've had, and that individual is just trying to do a job. I get so frustrated that it is a challenge to do what Paul says we should do in Philippians - to be humble in a way that puts the other person's interests ahead of our own.

I'm just using examples of the little stuff. When big things like personal happiness, or ethical principles, or adequate financial resources are on the line, and we feel at risk, it can be an even bigger challenge to muster up the kindness, commitment, and maturity to which we are called in Christ Jesus.

"I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called," says the author of Ephesians. "Be humble. Be gentle. Be patient. Get along."

The people who joined the earliest churches did not find this any easier to accomplish than many of us do. It's clear from reading this letter that the people in the church in Ephesus struggled to get along; they were really different from each other. In another early church, the Corinthians fought like cats and dogs - they even took each other to court. In all of these churches, people competed to get noticed and gain prestige.

How did they handle the challenges of Christian community, the invitation to Christian maturity? I'm sorry to report that they had no magic, foolproof formula that we might replicate. They did a lot of the same things we do. On their good days, they tried to give each other a little slack. People taught each other about Jesus and

tried to live like him. They also did their best to be good role models for each other. And they ate together. They gathered around a table and shared a meal, just like we will do today.

If we know one thing about Jesus, we know that he enjoyed eating and drinking with people. He ate with his disciples. He went to dinner at the house of Simon the Pharisee and Zacchaeus the tax collector. Mary and Martha hosted him in their home. He was famous for eating with tax collectors and sinners, and he got into a lot of trouble for it.

The tables where Jesus was present were places where hungry people were fed. Jesus' tables were spaces where everybody was welcome, no matter how many mistakes those people had made, and no matter how likeable or unlikeable they were. Jesus' tables were places where people made connections and found new friends; they built a new community. Jesus' tables were filled with the spiritual nourishment people needed, so that, when they got up from the table, they could walk the next few miles down whatever road God laid out before them.

In a few minutes you will be invited to this table, too. I hope you will come, because in partaking of this meal you will find strength and support for your everyday walk. Come to this table of grace:

“You who have much faith, and you who would like to have more;  
You who have been to this table often, and you who have not been in a long time;  
You who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed.  
Come: Christ invites us to meet him here.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>This communion invitation is from A Wee Worship Book, a Wild Goose resource developed by members of the Iona Community.