**Ephesians 4:1-16 – God’s heart and vision for us, his church**

**NMBC 7.7.24.**

**Key ideas:**

* God gives his Church its Identity, Calling, Gifting and Mission
* Some aspects of Identity, Calling, Gifting and Mission are universal to all churches throughout the ages, but some are specific to NMBC.
* Our present Identity, Calling, Gifting and Mission are rooted in our history, but they are also dynamic, and providing they remain Christ-focussed and Spirit led, they are likely to change and develop as we look towards the future.
* Ultimately, we are all called to serve and to use our different gifts in order to build up the church and to help it move towards complete unity and maturity in Christ.

**Key verse(s) – Ephesians 4:11-13…**

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

**Important words and phrases**

* Identity
* Calling
* Gifting
* Mission
* Ministry
* Encouragement
* Discipleship
* Prayer
* Welcome
* Worship
* Intercultural
* Multigenerational

**To prep:**

* Pray
* E mail out slides
* PRINT Preaching slides NOTES (whole pages)
* PRINT SLIDE HANDOUTS
* PRINT BULLETIN
* Slideshow AND VIDEO CHECK WITH PETER
* Microphone
* Clicker
* Pray with team

**Passage and prelude**

* Emmanuelle to read Ephesians 4:1-16 from NLT…

**Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. 2Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love. 3Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. 4For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.**

**5There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
6one God and Father of all,
who is over all, in all, and living through all.**

**7However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. 8That is why the Scriptures say,**

**“When he ascended to the heights,
    he led a crowd of captives
    and gave gifts to his people.”**

**9Notice that it says “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. 10And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.**

**11Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.**

**14Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. 15Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. 16He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.**

**Introduction**

* Good morning!
* Thank you, Emmanuelle/Dala, for reading God’s Word to us…
* This morning, together, we have the joy, privilege and opportunity of exploring this passage from Ephesians together…
* The text that we have just read is part of what was originally a letter, written by the Apostle Paul, to the church in Ephesus, an important city in Asia Minor, now modern-day Turkey…
* It was, quite likely, also a circular letter…intended to be read out not only in Ephesus, but in other early New Testament churches as well.
* Paul’s purpose in writing this letter was not to correct any particular false teaching or heresy, as was the case in some of his other letters…
* Instead, his purpose was to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might better understand the dimensions of God’s eternal purpose and grace, and come to fully appreciate the high goals that God has for his church.
* Our hope today is to share in this same purpose…
* And my prayer is that as we go from here today, we go with:
1. A clear understanding of God’s heart and vision for his Church, “capital C”,
2. A shared sense of God’s heart and vision for us, collectively, as the local church, here in this place, and…
3. A new feeling of collective excitement and anticipation as to what this might look like, feel like, and become like for us moving forwards together, as God’s family here at New Malden Baptist Church…

**2 mins**

**God’s heart and vision for his Church (throughout history)**

* Let’s begin with what this passage tells us about God’s heart and vision for his Church…for the church in Ephesus and his Church in general…
* There are four key elements that radiate out from this text…
* God wants his Church to know:
1. its **Identity**
2. its **Calling**
3. its **Gifting**, and…
4. Its **Mission**

**Identity…**

* Let’s begin with **Identity**…
* **Identity** is crucial because understanding who we are is essential in helping us to understand how we should live.
* So what does this text have to say about the **Identity** of God’s Church?...
* Firstly, God’s Church is described as “the body of Christ” (v12)…
* It’s a body which he makes “fit together perfectly” (v16)…with Jesus Christ as “the head” (v15).
* It’s a physical body, but it’s a body which is “united in Spirit” (v3).
* God’s Church is humble, gentle and patient (v2)…
* It’s a Church full of love (v16) and which, as a result, is full of people who are ready to forgive one another’s faults and imperfections(v2).
* The desire of a healthy church is to grow more and more like Christ (v15), to manifest the fruits of the Spirit…
* And to be united in peace (v3)…
* Does that sound good?...
* I think it does!
* That’s the **Identity** God gives to his Church…

**3 mins 45**

**Calling…**

* If the Church’s **Identity** is the spiritual DNA that God gives it, then the Church’s **Calling** is the spiritual stamp, or seal, that he places upon it…
* The Church’s **Calling** comes, of course, from God himself (v1)…
* It’s a **Calling** to a life worth living, a purpose-driven life, a “life in all its fulness”, as Jesus himself states in John 10:10.
* God’s Church is called to “glorious hope for the future” (v4)…
* It’s called to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city on a hill that cannot be hidden (Matt 5:13-14)…
* God’s Church is called to be a source of blessing and to carry hope for the nations (Gen 12:3, Isaiah 2:2-4)…
* It’s a Church of one faith (v5), one Lord, one God…a people alive and baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (vv5-6)…
* Does that sound good?...
* I think it does!
* That’s the **Calling** God gives to his Church…

**5 mins 15**

**Gifting…**

* Shaped by God, called by God, the Church is also gifted by God…
* God gives his Church special gifts, through the generosity of his Son, Jesus Christ (v7)…
* These gifts are embodied in many different types of people (v11)…
* They are to be used responsibly, to do God’s work and to build up his Church (v12)…
* They are gifts of faith and knowledge (v13)… gifts of heart and of head…
* Gifts which bring stability (v14), but which also promote unity (vv4-6,13) from within the richness of diversity (v11)…
* Do those gifts sound good?...
* I think they do!
* That’s the **Gifting** God gives to his Church…

**6 mins 15**

**Mission…**

* Identity, calling, gifting…but to what purpose?
* What does this passage tell us about the **Mission** that God has for his Church?
* Thankfully, it’s not “Mission Impossible”…instead it is “Mission Maturity” (v13)…
* God wants us to be “mature in the Lord”, not “tossed and blown about” by false teaching, tricks and temptations (v14).
* Our **Mission** towards maturity means “speaking the truth in love” (v15) and to grow to be “more like Christ” (v13)… in other words being holy, because he is holy!
* This passage makes it clear that we have a missional mandate to proclaim the gospel (vv11, 15) and to love and serve one another (v16), in order that the whole body (not some, not part, not most, but the whole body) is both “healthy and growing” (v16).
* Does that sound like a good **Mission**?...
* I think it does!
* That’s the **Mission** God gives to his Church…

**7 mins 30**

**Pause and link section…**

* How are we doing?...
* Are we encouraged by that?
* I know I am…
* And I’m also encouraged by how, this foundational teaching about God’s heart and vision for the Ephesian church, and his Church, “capital C” in general, resonates with God’s heart and vision for us here at NMBC.

**8 mins**

**God’s heart and vision for NMBC, past and present:**

* At a time when we are looking towards the future, it may seem strange to begin by looking back to the past…
* But as any good historian will tell you, understanding the past is the key not only to making sense of the present, but is also important in seeking to act wisely in the future…
* Let’s begin with our **Identity**…
* When I first joined the church over twenty years ago, the NMBC vision statement was as follows:

**“To be a Christ-centred community, which practises a ministry of encouragement”**

* Maybe that’s why I joined this church!...
* The vision of practising a ministry of encouragement resonated with my heart and my gifting.
* Encouragement is one of my primary spiritual gifts and in fact, over the course of my ministerial training, I grew to understand that whatever direction my future ministerial path might take, God was calling me “To become a Christ-centred minister, who practises a ministry of encouragement”…
* In this way, my own ministerial vision, has grown out of the church which I’ve been part of all these years, and it is the vision which underpins all that I seek to do.
* Yet whilst I believe that, to a greater or lesser extent, our present **Identity** as a church is rooted in our past experiences, I also believe that our **Identity** is dynamic and that over the course of time God helps us to grow, to develop and to change.
* We know that God loves us exactly as we are, but also that he loves us so much that he doesn’t want us to remain that way…
* Some parts of our **Identity** are fixed, and should not be forgotten, but overall, our **Identity** as a church is not static…
* Our identity should be Christ-focussed and Spirit informed…
* And we should always be seeking to move towards greater maturity, towards the whole measure of the fulness of Christ, that Paul refers to.
* As a Christ-centred community, which was practising a ministry of encouragement, in 2009 NMBC adopted a new way of expressing its **Identity**…

**“A group of ordinary people on a journey, exploring, experiencing and expressing the heart of God.”**

* As a group of ordinary people, the collective emphasis of the church’s **Identity** remained present, but now there was a sense of progress and forward movement (“journey”), of adventure (“exploring”), of discipleship (“experiencing”) and of evangelism (“expressing”).
* Last year, when our church profile went out, as part of our search for a new Pastoral Team Leader, these words were the ones we continued to use to describe our identity, and it *is* a great identity…
* It’s an identity that I’m comfortable with and which, I suspect, most of us would probably say we are happy with…
* But it isn’t necessarily an identity that will *always* best describe who we are moving forwards…
* In the years ahead, as we continue to grow and change, as we collectively move together towards greater maturity in the Lord, we are likely to need to be brave and to move beyond the comfortable…
* Jesus will doubtless continue to develop our Identity and to stretch our faith…more about that in a few minutes…
* Does that sound good?...
* I think it does!
* Even if it doesn’t necessarily sound easy…

**12 mins 15**

* Our collective **Identity** lies at our core, but our collective **Calling** is also crucial…crucial to understand and crucial for us to live out…
* Back in the late 1990s, NMBC recognised that discipleship was at the very centre of its **Calling**, and indeed discipleship remains as one of NMBC’s five core values today…
* Throughout the decades, NMBC has had a **Calling** to be “a disciple-making church”…to model discipleship through obedience, through learning, through teaching and through lived experience.
* Discipleship the Jesus way flows out from a life of love, love for God and love for others, a love generously expressed through service and sacrifice…
* And so, as we sit here today, the **Calling** that we collectively recognise amongst us is “**to love God and live generously**”…
* This **Calling** is based on the Great Commandment of Matthew 22:37-39 and the Great Commission that we heard about last week, from Matthew 28:19-20…
* Jesus’s words and Jesus’s **Calling**…
* Do they sound good?...
* Of course they do!
* But Jesus may, of course, also be **calling** us to more…
* More about that in a few minutes as well…

**14 mins 15**

* Jesus may well be **Calling** us to more, because collectively he has given us a great many **Gifts**…
* Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers… we have them all here in our congregation at NMBC and that is a tremendous blessing…
* We have fantastic musicians to lead us in songs of praise and worship…
* We have artists bursting with creativity…
* We have tremendously committed and gifted children’s and young people’s leaders…
* We have a talented and passionate group of young people themselves…
* NMBC has a wise, experienced and dedicated team of elders and deacons, gifted to lead and to oversee the many different areas of church life…
* But we also have many, many more who are gifted and who serve behind the scenes, or indeed who use their gifts in ways which are “never seen”…
* We have a faithful, faithful core of people who have served this church for decades…always reliable, never complaining, continuously blessing…blessing not only those within our own church family but also those on the fringes, or the so-called “outside”.
* And let us not forget the gift of prayer…
* If you are a pray-er, if you are someone who intercedes on behalf of others, who prays for the members of the church family, prays for the church leaders, prays for the sick, for the lonely, the grieving, prays for the stressed and the anxious and the broken, prays for our community, for our mission partners, for our nation, for the world…
* If you are someone who prays for repentance, for revival and for renewal…
* If you are someone who comes here to pray early in the morning, or in the evening, or on Zoom, or with your Bible open in front of you at home… Then thank you…
* Thank you for using an essential, perhaps THE essential, **Gifting** among us…

**16 mins 30**

* Listening to God and speaking with God are at the heart of any relationship with God…
* And it is relationship with the living God that lies at the heart of our **Mission** as a church…
* If you’ve been here on Sundays over this past month alone, you’ve seen this **Mission** lived out in front of your eyes…
* You’ve seen people being baptised into the worldwide family of the church, you’ve heard people publicly declaring their faith and testifying to their relationship with the living Lord Jesus…
* You’ve witnessed new people coming into a covenant relationship as members of NMBC…
* You’ve been stirred by the way in which last Sunday the group of teenage boys and those from the Alpha Course, supported and prayed for Isaac, John and Charles…
* You’ve been invited to Love All, Serve All in the Wimbledon queue
* You’ve been asked to pray for the Bolivian young people in the Operation Restoration homes…
* **Mission** amongst us, **Mission** on our doorstep, **Mission** across the world…
* All **Mission** is God’s Mission…
* **Mission** is God’s heart for us here at NMBC…
* Does that sound good?...
* I think it does!
* But once again, I believe there’s more to come…

**18 mins**

**Pause and link section…**

* Now I hope, as I share and speak about these things, that there are some of you listening who feel excited?… (PAUSE…)
* Some of you, however, may feel daunted, and that’s ok too…we’re in this together…and with Jesus alongside us, as well as in front of us and behind us we can move forwards confidently and without getting bogged down in the detail…
* One of my favourite pieces of spiritual wisdom comes from Bear Grylls who, I’ve recently discovered, is not only a survival expert and a tennis fan, but is also somewhat of an under-rated theologian…
* Bear says this…

**“Always keep the big picture in mind – you are greatly loved by Jesus and your job is to love Him and others in return. The rest is detail.”**

* I have to say, I think that’s a pretty good summary of our **Identity, Calling, Gifting** and **Mission**, so let’s keep that in mind as we now look towards the future….
* So, let’s do that together now…
* Let’s conclude by imagining together what God’s heart and vision for NMBC might be, moving forwards…

**19 mins 30**

**God’s heart and vision for NMBC, moving forwards into the future:**

* As you may know, an image of God’s heart hangs here on a wall upstairs in the Beech Room…
* It’s a painting of God’s promise of a new heart and new spirit for his people, as expressed in Ezekiel 36:26…
* But as we stand on the threshold of our future, as God’s people here in this place, I want to share with you three other prophetic images, which I believe God has given us, images which depict both who we already are and what the Holy Spirit is already doing amongst us, but more than that… images which speak prophetically of God’s heart and vision for us, as a church, moving forwards…images which represent things we are already starting to see, but things where I believe God has more in store for us…

**20 mins 30**

**Three prophetic images**

1. **Wall of Welcome**
* This is an image of the wall that greets us, as we arrive through the Kingston Road entrance and into the foyer. It’s an image I’ve put up on the screen before when speaking but it’s an image that will be more important than ever for us moving forwards…
* I believe this Wall of Welcome is a prophetic statement, not only of God’s welcoming heart towards all who walk through these doors but also of our desire to be a people who demonstrate God’s Warm Welcome in both word and action…
* But that is not all…
* The Wall of Welcome also reflects our ever-increasing international identity and speaks, in multi-lingual fashion, of God’s Mission to the nations and our **Calling** both to welcome those of every tribe, nation and language and to be sent out to minister to the nations…nations on our doorstep here in New Malden, nations across London and nations across the world…
* Situated in an area with a very significant east-Asian and south-Asian community, NMBC now has a Korean evangelist and an international congregation, but this is yet to be truly represented in our church membership roll, in our church leadership team, or in our preaching and leading team on a Sunday morning.
* God has more for us here in this area…more for us to do in terms of international hospitality, invitation and integration and more for us to become, as a truly intercultural church.
* And we will all have our part to play…

**22 mins 30**

1. **Psalm 24 painting**
* I’ve shown and referred to this image on at least one previous occasion but I do so now again because I believe now, more than ever before, it prophetically portrays God’s heart and vision for us at NMBC moving forwards…
* This painting portrays Psalm 24, a great psalm which declares the Lord’s sovereignty over the earth, over his creation.
* It’s a psalm which invites us to draw closer to God, to be pure and holy before him, to look up, to ascend his holy mountain and to seek his face.
* This psalm combines both the old and the new… the gates, the ancient doors are invited to lift up their heads, to lift up their gaze and to welcome in the King of glory, the Lord Almighty…
* I believe that this is God’s heart and God’s vision for us moving forwards... For NMBC, more than ever before, to be a people who seek the Lord Almighty, who welcome him amongst us, who praise him and who worship him…
* But before we move on, let’s not miss what may appear to be a small detail in the painting, but something that I believe is very significant in prophetic terms…
* Look carefully at the bottom left-hand corner…
* Here is a close-up of this part of the picture…
* What do you see?
* What I see is a child, pulling on an adult’s hand, a young person, hungry not to be led, but hungry to lead…to lead those around them, whether senior in years or not, closer to God, to join those already up there on the hilltop in praising and worshipping the Lord…
* We are a multi-generational church…
* We have great children and young people, we have a very good number of them amongst us…
* And they need our help…
* They need us to give them opportunities…they need us to allow them to lead us, to encourage and to inspire us…
* Last Sunday, we heard 13 year old John witnessing from here at the front to his not-yet Christian parents…
* And I believe God has more in store for us in this area… as long as we let him… as long as we let them…lead us in worship, in learning and in love…
* Here again, we will all have our part to play…

**25 mins 30**

1. **Worship weave**
* Two powerful images shared, one more to go…
* The third image is not of another image but of an object… an object that is still work in progress, but an object that many of us have played a part in helping to create…
* It’s our “worship weave”, as explained by Lynda several months ago now, and currently with Lisa Trend for completion and hanging…watch this space…
* Why is this piece prophetic? Why does this help depict God’s heart and vision for NMBC moving forwards?
* Well, three reasons…
* Firstly, it’s a collective piece of work, just as Christ’s body, the church is made up from many different parts, each knitted together and called to contribute and to serve by using their unique and different gifts, so this weave comes together from many different pieces of cloth, each chosen, each made unique by someone from the church family, bringing it and adding it towards the whole work.
* Secondly, written on the pieces of cloth that make up this weave, are Bible verses, promises, spiritual truths given by God, to us, to encourage our hearts and for us to share and ourselves use to encourage others and bear witness for God’s glory. This is God’s rich tapestry, one that represents the fact that he has given us a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair (Isaiah 61:3).
* Thirdly, and finally, the pieces of cloth that make up this weave aren’t new, aren’t expensive, aren’t particularly beautiful in themselves… they’ve seen something of life, they’ve been around the block, as far as pieces of cloth go… but they’re not done yet… they have a legacy to leave and a significance that still speaks…
* If that’s you, if you’re one of those older pieces of cloth, if you’ve served faithfully over many years, day in day out then this word, I believe is for you…
* “**God is not done with you yet**”,… in fact this time which stands ahead is a crucially important time…
* It’s a time for you to be significant in the life of this church, to play your part in passing on your wisdom, your skills, your faith to others, to hold loosely the baton that you’ve been running with all these years and to pass it, wisely, and in timely fashion on to those who are to follow…
* You’ve run a great race, you’ve kept the faith, you’ve been a wonderful example and you continue to be so…but you don’t need to run yourself into the ground… it’s good to be willing and ready to pass the baton on and then to sit down at the Lord’s feet and to take a rest…
* And we will all have our part to play in this…

**29 mins**

**Conclusion**

* We will all have our part to play in this because…
* We, collectively, are God’s church…
* We are not all ministers, but we are *all* called to minister…
* New Malden Baptist Church, was, is and will be a church of “every member ministry”…
* It’s a church where we all share an identity in Christ and, where wherever we sit in the theological spectrum, we all believe in one faith, one hope, one baptism, one Lord…
* It’s a church where we are all called to follow and to imitate Christ, to listen to and to be led by the Holy Spirit, to be faithful to reading and proclaiming the truths of God’s Word, to grow together in love and maturity and to collectively discern the mind of Christ…
* NMBC is a church full of God-given gifting and gifted, godly people… some who use their gifts to lead from up front, some who serve behind the scenes and some who listen and pray and who help in ways that are never seen...never seen by anyone, except by God of course!
* NMBC is a church of God’s Mission, a **Mission** of rescue, of restoration, of renewal and revival…
* A **Mission** of shared, collective, **ministry**…
* I leave you with my favourite definition of **Ministry**, from Warren Wiersbe, pastor and well-known author of Christian books and commentaries…

**“Ministry takes place when divine resources, meet human need, through loving channels for the glory of God”**

* May we all be loving channels for God’s divine resources, for his glory…both now and into the future, as we move forwards together in his name…

**31 mins**

* Let us pray…

**The Brendan Covenant (put it up on screen)**

**For sermon on 21st July…**

Five prophetic words – W, E, B, S, G and “new” vision statement…

Three prophetic images from Feb 2023

And a re-cap of one important definition and one collective commitment (from sermon on 7th July)