

Personal Matters
[Ephesians 6:21-24](#)
Rev. Curtis Bablitz
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Last Sunday, we read the most famous passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the instructions to the church to put on the full armour of God. That passage comes right at the end of the letter, and it's the culmination of everything that has gone before it – Ephesians is a perfectly constructed work of theological genius, a succinct, focused summary of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But if you know anything about the rest of Paul's letters, you might recognize that this is a little surprising. When Paul wrote his letters, he was writing to churches, usually churches that he had founded or at the very least visited. He was writing to actual people, usually people he knew very, very well. And that means that his letters are usually very personal – they aren't abstract essays discussing theoretical problems, they are personal instructions dealing with actual, concrete issues happening in a specific context. Read Paul's letters to the church in Corinth, for instance, and this is impossible to miss – all throughout these letters, Paul is addressing individual problems that he's heard are causing trouble in a church he founded among people he deeply loves. Most of Corinthians is Paul saying stuff like, Look, tell Anthony he needs to stop being so selfish, tell Mary and Nick to stop making out in the back pew during worship, tell Peter he needs to forgive Fred. Paul uses all these

personal matters, personal stories to teach the church about God – the whole point of 1 Corinthians 13, his beautiful passage about Love, is that the church in Corinth is finding it really difficult to love each other. Paul's letters contain instruction on how Christians should live and work and worship, but those lessons are always connected with an argument that is already happening in that particular church that Paul is trying to solve. Paul is never afraid to deal with personal matters, the personal stories of the people he's writing to, the churches he loves so very much.

And that's why this letter to the Ephesians is so surprising. According to the book of Acts, Paul founded the church in Ephesus and spend several years living there, building up this community of believers – Ephesus became a kind of home base for Paul's missionary journeys, a city he would return to again and again, a place of refuge and encouragement where he could be among friends. But you wouldn't know any of that by reading Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians doesn't have any personal stories – it doesn't address any specific problems in the Ephesian church, any disputes or disagreements going on that they needed Paul's advice to solve. This letter is surprisingly impersonal – it sounds like a letter written to strangers, to a city Paul had never visited, Christians he had never met, instead of a letter written to one of the most supportive, loving communities that had sheltered and encouraged Paul again and again during his journeys. And there are all kinds of theories about why this is so, why Ephesians sounds so impersonal.

Some scholars think this letter wasn't really meant for the Ephesians specifically, that Paul just wrote down a letter of general theological teachings and principles and sent it out to be shared by all the different churches in the area. Others argue that this letter couldn't have actually been written by Paul at all – that it must have been one of Paul's followers who, after Paul's death, wrote down what he thought Paul might have wanted to say to the church in Ephesus if he had the chance. The lack of personal matters in this letter is so surprising, so confusing, that we've come up with all these theories to try and explain it, to understand why this letter is the way it is.

And I don't have an answer to that question. I don't know why Ephesians is written the way it is. But I think the verses we read this morning from the very, very end of the letter to the Ephesians, I think they can give us a clue. Most of the time when we read Ephesians, we stop where we did last week – with that wonderful, stirring passage about the armour of God. That's where the lectionary, the list of recommended readings for every Sunday in the church year, that's where it stops. But the letter itself keeps going, with these last few verses, last few sentences that deal with personal matters. Paul tells the church that he is sending a man named Tychicus to carry this letter to the church on his behalf – Tychicus, our dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord. But Tychicus' job is not just to carry Paul's letter with the teaching he has for the church in Ephesus. Paul sends

Tychicus to tell the church – his friends, the people he lived with and worked with for all those years, the people he loves – to tell them how he’s doing – “so that you may also know how I am and what I am doing. I am sending him to you that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.” So Paul’s letter to the Ephesians isn’t a cold, impersonal letter, written to a group of strangers he didn’t know or care for. Paul loved the people of Ephesus so much that his communication with the church was bigger than just the letter that we have, the words that we read – he also sent a personal report through his friend and brother, Tychicus, so that the people of Ephesus would know and understand just how much Paul loved and cherished them, so they could hear the good news of what God was doing in Paul’s life. We don’t get to hear that part of the letter – the personal matters that Paul passed on to the Ephesians through his friend Tychicus are beyond our knowledge, but they still matter. They’re still part of Paul’s story, still part of the story of the church in Ephesus. Paul sent Tychicus with this personal update on his own condition so that the Ephesians would be encouraged by hearing the good news that God is still blessing and caring for Paul – even though Paul is in prison, even though he has suffered greatly for the sake of the gospel, Paul still knows that his story will build up the church and help them to stand strong and grow as followers of Jesus Christ. The letter Paul wrote to the Ephesians is wonderful – brilliant theology, helping that church and every church

understand more about who God is and how we are called to live as Christ's people here in this world – but it isn't complete without Tychicus, without Paul's personal story told by his friend to build up and encourage the church that Paul dearly loves.

When you read Paul's letters, it is easy to rush through the closing verses, to skip over these little passages at the end filled with names and greetings and personal matters so we can get back to the serious important theology, but the story of Paul and Tychicus and the Ephesian church is worth hearing. We Presbyterians have a bad habit of making our faith, our relationship with God, something that happens only in our heads. We sometimes act like the most important thing we can do as Christians is to try to understand God – to know everything there is about who God is, to study God like something that can be dissected and analyzed, weighed and measured and fully deciphered. We engage with our faith primarily through our head, through what we can hear and learn and understand through sermons and scripture and works of theological genius. And don't get me wrong, all of that is good – it is good to use the minds God has blessed us with to learn as much as we can about what God has done for us. But we can't stop there. Our relationship with God can't just be about what we think and what we know. Our relationship with God is meant to be personal – after all the theology and scriptural interpretation is done, there is still room for personal matters, for testimony, for telling each other the story of how we encountered Jesus Christ, how we fell in

love with the one who loved us so deeply and completely that he died to set us free. I know that many people here have a story like that – a story of what God has done for you, all the ways God blessed you and guided you and helped you realize just how vast and unmeasurable the love of Christ truly is – and part of our calling as Christ's church is to share those stories with one another, so we will know what God is doing here in our midst, so we will be encouraged knowing that God is so good because we see that goodness in the lives of our neighbours and friends. And we don't tell these stories to build ourselves up – to make ourselves the stars of the story, to bring ourselves glory because we're such great Christians. We tell these stories to bring God glory and encourage one another with the good news of what God is doing with us and for us, to remind each other that God is still at work in the church – the Holy Spirit is still on the move, still filling our lives with Peace and Grace and love that never ends. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to make our faith personal – to allow the story of Christ's death and resurrection to become our story, and then to share our story with everyone we meet, so they will know that God is at work here in this church and in the world around us. So today, Go and tell the story of what Jesus Christ has done for you. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen!