Sermon notes on Ephesians 4 vv 4 – 6; 2 Peter 1 vv 3 – 11
'Uniting behind the vision day by day'

The Bayeaux Tapestry is on tour and it might be a once in a lifetime opportunity to see it here in this country. This is probably why the tickets went in a blink of an eye and why we ended standing outside the Natural History Museum last Monday afternoon because we'd had found an alternative to the Bayeaux Tapestry, it is called the Baa-Ewe Tapestry. But when we got there, there was an hour-long queue just to get into the Museum and we had with us four children who'd just had a six-hour journey and we weren't sure if there was going to be yet another queue inside the Museum to see it, so we decided to go to the Monument instead!! The next day some of us decided to give it another go and we were successful but to be honest it was such a massive anticlimax. It is only 7m long instead of the 70m which the Bayeaux is. True there was no queue, but it was incredibly underwhelming which was most likely due to our unrealistic expectations. In these three verses Paul gives us a sevenfold list of nouns which bear all the hallmarks of being equally underwhelming but in this case appearances here are very deceptive. For these seven nouns are a blue touchpaper which should make us all go ooohh and aaahh, so let's light the blue touchpaper and enjoy the show!!

Of course, when I mention blue touchpaper, you might think I'm referring to the Gunpowder plot of 1605, but you'd be wrong. The touchpaper I'm thinking of is midnight on the 2nd September 1666 when a spark from a baker's oven in Pudding Lane ignited some firewood starting the Great Fire of London. We had a fabulous time at the Monument with its 311 steps, wow views, brilliant security fencing at the top and that still slight sense of nausea you have when you're so high up and look through grill. The Great Fire burned for four days during which 13,000 houses and 87 churches, including the old St Paul's, were destroyed. But the imagery used as the city was rebuilt was of a brand new and better one as it emerged like a phoenix from the ashes. Paul's sevenfold list of nouns describes the incredible new unified view, or vision, of life we have as individuals and as a church because of Jesus.

In Jesus we are made **ONE**, which means we are no longer fractured or disjointed in ourselves, instead we have been made whole by God's wholeness which continues to shape and define us. As those made whole in Jesus, we have been gifted true and real peace with ourselves, with Jesus and with each other. The most important question we are to ask ourselves is, 'Do you know, do you feel Jesus' multi layered peace within your life? I have prayed for many years a midday prayer without realising that I had been using words written by a 16th Century Catholic mystic called Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). Her words are: "Let nothing disturb thee or affright thee, All things are passing; God never changeth; Patient endurance attaineth to all things; Who God possesseth in nothing is wanting; alone God sufficeth." I have always found these words to be incredibly comforting, as well as challenging, because I know how often I am disturbed and affrighted and that I have often allow myself to be disturbed and affrighted again and again.

When Paul uses 'one' as the common adjective in this sevenfold list of nouns, we need to hear carefully what he is saying here. What he is not saying is that there is only one

way of thinking about these seven nouns. Paul is not imposing a theological conformity upon us, instead he is reminding us that all our thinking, believing and living is to be placed within the boundary of our overwhelming commitment to oneness and wholeness. We are to remind ourselves that our God is both one and three; within his very being there is both unity and diversity, oneness and difference and we are to encourage the same.

Here, once again, we are to choose to embrace God's vision of oneness, or wholeness, and I like how 2 Peter chapter 1 describes the multilayered life as a helpful way of doing this. Here in 2 Peter this life is described as our adding and adding and adding another element, or virtue, to our lives so that they may be as rich, as full, as like Jesus as they possibly can be. Paul describes this same multilayered life in this way. Our lives are made full because we are part of one body which is the church with all its joys and strengths, as well as its faults and failings. We are filled by this one Spirit, where we become the Temple of the living God. We share together in one hope which Paul has described in chapter one verse 10 when all things on heaven and earth will be made one, made whole, in Jesus. We celebrate that there is one Lord, who is Jesus, and we are to love him with all our, heart, mind, soul and strength amidst a world of competing claims upon us. We are a people of one faith which is about what we believe, but also of our being faithful and trusting in Jesus in our lives. We are a people of one baptism where we publicly and joyfully confess our faith in Jesus and commit ourselves to him. We dare to hold onto this one God in a world which is sceptical of him but also deeply polytheistic in its life.

We remind ourselves that our God is like the Irish sevenfold blessing, where he is above and greater than all being, where he works through all and every situation and where he is in the warp and woof of every detail of life. When I think of our sixfold vision day commitment, and especially of our current focus on prayer and evangelism, which does not mean that we forget the rest, we remind ourselves that they speak of who our God is and the shape we believe our lives are to take.

On Wednesday last week Sir Patrick Stewart of Next Generation Star Trek fame and other Hollywood franchises died. He was born in Mirfield in West Yorkshire and he came from a troubled background and it was acting which saved his life and enabled him to be the whole person he was admired, respected and loved for. But, as awesome as Patrick Stewart was, in Jesus we are all made even more whole, or one, than he was; in fact, you could say we are made seven times more whole than he was. This seven-fold life is the life we're all to live out, to pray into, to invite others to know, to love Jesus in, plumb the awe and wonder of, to discover and to weep in our life there is so much of the undiscovered country we will never know in this life. But God's plans and purposes are such that in our life to come we will have an eternity to discover more and more of what God's love is like. So may we dare to boldly live, as we have never lived before.