

The 10th Sunday after Pentecost
August 1, 2021

“Christ edifies each of us to share in the growth of His church”
(Ephesians 4:11-16)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this 10th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Epistle reading – Ephesians 4:11-16

“11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Here ends our text.

We’ve spent the last three weeks hearing the epistle readings from the first three chapters of Ephesians. St. Paul laid out the doctrinal teachings of the Christian faith. We heard about the doctrine of our election in chapter 1, the doctrine of justification by faith by God’s grace in chapter 2 and the building of the Christian Church in chapter 3.

Now Paul begins to apply these teachings to our everyday life as he opens chapter 4. Chapters 4-6, which we will be studying today and the next four Sundays are the practical applications of the Christian doctrine. The Holy Christian church of all believers in Christ continues to be equipped and edified until as St. Paul says in

verse 13, **“we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;”**

When is that? Well, even the apostles admit that they haven’t reached that point of Christian maturity yet. It’s not until we reach heaven that we will be made perfect. Until then, we press on as St. Paul says in Philippians 3:12,

“12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”

Press on. None of us are there yet. There is so much refining, personal growing and personal application of God’s truths that continues on a daily basis in each or our lives.

Again, Paul emphasizes in this verse that it was Christ who first laid hold of him as He does for all of us. Christ rescued each of us purely by His grace when He called each of us through faith (Ephesians 2). We are saved 100% by Christ’s work on the cross. You and I cannot contribute a thing to our salvation! It was even planned before the foundation of the world as we heard in chapter 1. And as Christ’s workmanship, we are **“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)**

As Paul opens chapter 4, this is what he is drawing our attention to now. He’s introducing us to what it is to live as God’s people in His church. We’re part of the church, the one Christian church. We’ve been called by faith into it. So now, God’s got big plans for each of us.

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,”

What we have been given is of such high esteem, our calling, that is, our salvation and eternal life, that our life should reflect this. We should endeavor to walk worthy of it. Paul is urging, begging the Ephesians and each of us to take our Christian lives seriously, each and every day.

Again, it’s all by God’s grace that we were called, that Christ laid hold of us. And it’s all by His grace that we now walk with the Lord in this new life – the life of sanctification.

Paul's walk included imprisonment for the sake of the Gospel. It was for the Ephesians benefit and our too. For the first thing that Paul emphasizes is that our Christian walk is one of humbleness. **“with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**

There's that saying that “you can't teach an old dog new tricks”. But though that may be true for dogs, the Holy Spirit can certainly teach all of us, regardless of our age new words of strength and comfort so that **“we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,”**

And not only is our personal growth important for our each of our souls, but it is important for the growth of the body of Christ as a whole. We learn to be humble and gentle and patient with each other to keep the bond of peace of God's church. Of course, God established the unity of His church by forgiving and cleansing the church of all her sins. We could not do this. But we are called, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to maintain the unity of the church against those who would try to tear it down by false doctrine.

So our first new/old trick is to walk with lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love. How can we possibly do that? Well, the power to walk a worthy walk comes from God through His Word and Sacraments. So Paul continues on in verse 4 of our epistle reading with these words of fact. **“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”**

God is above us all for He created and provides for us all. He is through us all in that He provides for our entire well-being of body and soul through His holy people, and He is in all as He dwells among us. He accomplishes this through His means of Word and Sacraments as Paul says - one faith and one baptism. Paul points us to the teachings of the one faith of Christ our Lord as we know them summarized in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. And he points us to our baptism that brought us into the one body of Christ.

When we confess the creeds, we humble ourselves before God and each other that it is by His grace alone that I am created, redeemed and sanctified to serve Him in His church.

God has a lot of new tricks to teach all of us old dogs as we learn to serve each other and do our share for the growth of God's church.

That's what St. Paul is getting at when he wrote, **“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,”**

Especially God has called pastors to equip and edify His Church for the work of the ministry. All of us have been called to use the gifts that we have been given. So Paul tells us in verse 7 of our epistle, **“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.”**

Each of us has been given gifts for the good of others. Again, we are to walk worthy of our calling, using the gifts God has given us in all lowliness and gentleness. We're all different. That's a good thing so that each of us can supply what is needed for the good of all. God knows what His church needs and He gives the gifts to His people according to His wisdom.

Think of the Olympics. Not everybody is a top swimmer, runner, gymnast, diver, soccer player, golfer, skateboarder or ping pong player. But all do their part for the good of the country. Each athlete has unique gifts which are for the good of trying to get gold medals for the United States. Of course, as we know our prize is eternal and our gold medal has been won for us by Christ's death and resurrection. He's called us into this race to now use the gifts and talents for the good of His church.

What does God call His people to do? **“speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”**

We speak God's truth, not our truth, in love for others. For God's truth is saving truth and it alone causes growth of His church. The latest fads, gimmicks or ideas created by man to make the church grow are worthless tricks.

St. Paul has emphasized to the Ephesians and to us again today, that the teachings of the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the Cornerstone, are what are effective for the growth of the body. The church is edified in the love of Christ. Hear again Ephesians 2:20-21.

“Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,”

And similarly, Paul says in Colossians 2:16-19.

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.”

We’ll hear these verses again in our Bible class that follows which will talk about the false doctrine of works righteousness, the old patch, trying to be substituted for the new cloth, the Gospel – salvation in Jesus.

This is what the church needs to guard against above all in order for it to grow. Let no one cheat you by not holding fast to Christ. For in Him alone does the church grow. In Him alone does the church learn of His lowliness, gentleness and love which led Him to the cross for our salvation. In Him alone, are we called into His body, the one Christian church. In Him alone, are we made worthy, righteous by His forgiveness. In Him alone, each of us has been given gifts to share for the building up of His church. In Him alone are we kept in this one true faith until we arrive “at the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ” at His final coming.

So, we press on. We learn new tricks. We learn of the gifts that God has given each of us to do our part. We’re joints, ligaments, muscles that God has knit together as He has called us by grace into His one glorious church – the body of Christ. Amen

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)