

## **Celebrate Being A Church: Serving, Equipping, Loving, Transforming**

Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-12, 15-16

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*I therefore beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one God, one faith, one baptism, one God who is above all and through all and in all.*

*The gifts Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...*

*Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into the One who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

What is the church? What is our church?

Is the church the building? No. That is one important lesson we learned during the pandemic. The building can be closed. We can worship online. We can gather on Zoom. But we are still the church.

Is the church a budget of income and expenses? No. Budgets do reflect our priorities, our commitments, our mission and ministry, but a budget and money are not the church. We express our gratitude by giving. We celebrate the ways God is moving in our lives, our church and the world as we use the building and pay staff.

Is our church a set of beliefs that everyone must agree to? No. We are grounded in biblical stories, Reformed theology, Celtic Christian spirituality, prophets old and new. Christian Presbyterian household. We are not bound by one set of beliefs, but we continue to discuss how we are welcoming and inclusive and can learn truths from other spiritual traditions.

Is the church, our church like a body? Yes. You have heard it many times today – as we ordained and installed deacons and ruling elders. The questions asked are the same ones asked of people who teaching elders, pastors. We have different gifts. Women and men are called by God to serve in different ways in the church. This understanding was foundational for the early church.

Ephesians 4 is, in part, about the kind of leaders which the church needs--people who can be catalysts, both challenge and comfort and inspire the congregation as we move into new challenges and opportunities.

Verses 11-13 tell us, in quick, summary fashion, about some of the people whom God has given to lead the church: "The gifts Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers."

The text also describes the work God calls those leaders to do: equip the saints (the people) for the work of ministry, build up the body of Christ, help people to become more Christ-like.

"Equipping" is listening, teaching, training, supporting. It is also about restoration and healing. The word **equip** in our text comes from an interesting family of Greek words which describe, among other things, the setting of broken bones during surgery, fostering healing, and working for rehabilitation.

This same family of words makes an appearance in the Gospel of Matthew's account of Jesus' calling Galilean fisher-folk to be his followers. When Jesus invited James and John to the adventure of discipleship, they were "in the boat with their father, mending their nets." (Matthew 4:21) **Mending** is from this same family of words, so mending and equipping are related, which means that to equip is to weave back together the frayed edges of life.

This understanding of equipping means that leadership involves a crucial dimension of healing and restoration. All of us have experiences which rend and tear us; we all have times when fatigue or failure tempts us to give up. As a church we need leaders who are help, encourage, lift up. And these days we need church leaders who are nimble. Who are willing to listen to concerns and to be bold when new direction and new dreams are emerging.

The church is a body, each part with different gifts. The church has leaders who equip the body for ministry, for shared life, for health. Let's imagine some different parts of the body.

Session members – different functions and share leadership. Ears for listening. The part of the brain that remembers who we have been and our core values. And eyes to look around. Where are we now and where do we need to go. Hearts and minds open to the Spirit.

Deacons – Who offer listening ear to offer support. Mouths to offer words of comfort and prayer. Hands to bring meals and hands for holding. Hearts of compassion.

PDA team – hands and feet of the body this week. Hands and arms wielding hammers, nail guns, saws, measuring tape as they rebuild homes in Paradise.

IN the Presbyterian church, we function as a body. At every level of the church, there is a gathering of people pastors and elders who discern where God is at work and to make decisions. I appreciate that model.

Healthy leadership in the church begins with friendship. I appreciate people who enjoy working together, can laugh at their mistakes, engage in ministry with trust and openness rather than control and fear, and exemplify God's love through their spiritual gifts. As a community of faith we have assets—friendship, leadership authority, truthfulness, time and place, money, passions —which can be used to create new opportunities for that transform people lives in the congregation and our partners in the community.

The church is a body. And the church is a team. Your coaches are the session. The Deacons are team medics and chaplains being with the team in times of wounds, hurt and losses.

I will close with some wisdom about coaching and team work from the popular show *Ted Lasso* starring Jason Sudeikis. Ted Lasso is a show about an American college football coach who gets hired to coach British football (soccer) team. Ted has an awe-shucks demeanor. He doesn't know the first thing about soccer - he frequently asks the very players he's supposed to be coaching for clarifications about strategies and basic rules. In every situation, he is kind. Kind in an intentional way. As one writer put it, he is ruthlessly kind.

Despite lacking knowledge of the mechanics of soccer, Coach Lasso has fundamental knowledge of the way people work. Lasso observes the way the players engage with each other and uses those nuggets of information to establish a stronger, more united team. He sees people for who they are at their core and seeks the good in everyone. His star player is phenomenal, but is not a team player. Lasso says, "Remember, you are one in a million and you are one of eleven." Be a team player. And in a legendary dart game, Coach Lasso brilliantly delivers good coaching wisdom for teams and churches, "Be curious, not judgmental."

We are members of a body each with different gifts.

We have amazing elders and deacons leading us with courage and kindness.

Let's look for moments to show kindness this week.

Let's pray for our leaders as they seek to guide us and equip us.

Let's live being open and curious. Amen.