

“What Did You Get?”

Ephesians 4:4-16

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • July 8, 2018

When I was growing up one of my books had a short poem that I remember reading over and over again. It's a very old poem. In fact, it was old when Benjamin Franklin included it in his Poor Richard's Almanac. Chances are you've heard it before. It goes like this: "For the want of a nail the shoe was lost. For the want of the shoe the horse was lost. For the want of a horse the rider was lost. For the want of a rider the battle was lost. For the want of a battle the kingdom was lost. All for the want of a nail."

The idea is that even though a horseshoe nail is very small, not having one when you need it can have big consequences. I think that's a good illustration of what we find in God's Word in Ephesians 4. As I mentioned last week, the book of Ephesians is like an instruction manual on how to be part of Christ's church. The first part of Ephesians is a beautiful description of what God has done for you, choosing you, adopting you, and blessing you beyond belief. Then here in chapter 4 Paul begins to give us instructions on how we are to respond to what God has done and it all revolves around the Church, and that's what we want to look at this morning.

Verses 12 and 13 give us God's purpose for the Church. God created the Church "for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." In other words, the primary job of churches is to help people grow to become more and more like Jesus. The goal is mature Christ-followers.

As a parent, my primary goal in raising children is to raise mature adults. Sometimes we forget that, don't we. It's difficult to let our children grow up. We want them to stay little. But it's more difficult if they DON'T grow up. One of the things that has changed significantly in recent years is the number of young people who are achieving the five markers of

adulthood. These are five milestones that researches say mark the transition from youth to adult, and they are completing education, working full-time, living independently (meaning living in their own place and supporting themselves), getting married, and having children. Obviously you don't have to complete all of these to be an adult. Lots of adults never marry or have children. But researches generally consider attaining three or more of these to be a good indication of adulthood. And today nearly a fourth of people aged 25-34 have not attained three of the markers.

But before we start pointing fingers at who is to blame, let's just consider that in many ways we're not much better off. Our passage is not concerned with adulthood but with spiritual maturity and we are all susceptible to being spiritually immature. Paul says that we are to grow up in Christ "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."

So what are the markers of spiritual maturity? How do we know how we are doing? One way you can know how you're doing is to honestly look at your life in relation to the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5 – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Have you perfected each of those or is there still room for improvement?

But there's another aspect we need to consider. Notice that Paul is not saying that the goal is for *you* to attain a certain spiritual maturity. He says that the goal is for *all* of us to "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." In other words, the way you have to judge your own spiritual maturity is by the maturity of your entire faith community. It's like one of those group projects in school where the entire group gets the same grade. Those projects work best when everyone

in the group does their part to the best of their abilities.

Guess what. That's God's design for the church, too. Your spiritual maturity is closely tied to your participation. As I often say, Christianity is a team sport. When I was young I played on a softball team. I was terrible. The coach had me play center field because it was the position farthest away from home plate and so least likely for a 9-year-old to hit the ball. But on a "real" baseball team every position matters and every person playing his position well matters. That's how God has set up the church.

Our passage begins with this wonderful picture of the importance of unity in the church. One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." But the very next verse, verse 7, says, "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." We are all one team but Jesus has given each of us particular gifts for the benefit of His church. What are those gifts? Verse 11 says, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers."

Historically the church has tended to say that apostles and prophets refer only to the original apostles of Jesus and the other New Testament writers and that now that we have the New Testament there are no more apostles or prophets. But recently there has been a movement in church renewal circles to point out that while we don't have apostles with a capital A, such as the original apostles, each of these is still the work of the church and so God still gifts people to serve the church in each of these areas. That means that Jesus has given *you* abilities in one or more of these areas. So let's briefly look at each one.

Apostles. The word "apostle" means one who is sent. Jesus called his original twelve disciples apostles because he sent them out to preach and to heal. After his resurrection he commissioned them to "go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;

teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you." Today the Church is sent by Jesus into the world. People gifted in this area tend to have creative ideas for ministry and a desire to see the church grow and multiply.

Prophets. The prophetic role of the church is to call people and society as a whole to repentance. This includes an emphasis on justice and mercy and holiness. People gifted in this area have a heart for those who are at the margins of society, for those who can't speak for themselves (like the unborn) because God has a heart for "the least of these." If you think you may have gifts here you should be involved with our serving ministry.

Evangelists. The evangelism role of the church is to effectively communicate the good news of Jesus to people who don't have a relationship with Him. Central to this task is finding creative ways to invite people to explore who Jesus is and what following Him looks like. All of us are called to the work of evangelism but some are gifted to help lead and train the rest of us. That's the work of our Evangelism ministry.

Shepherds. Jesus is known as the Great Shepherd. The shepherding function of the church is to help create community and promote healing and wholeness within the Body of Christ. We call this our Connecting Ministry and it's where we try to help people build meaningful relationships with other believers. It's also how we care for one another, especially during times of illness or crisis. If you have a desire to help the church become more like a family, you might be gifted in this area and should be serving with our Connecting Ministry.

Teachers. This is probably the one that many of us Presbyterians feel most at home. The church's teaching function is to help people learn the content of the faith and develop a love for the Scriptures. This is where we do learning and thinking in Bible studies. If you enjoy teaching or simply helping people grow in their faith, you should consider serving in our Discipleship ministry.

If you are a follower of Jesus, He has given you a special role in the Church. Every one of us is gifted to serve in some way. Verse 12 shows us why God has given us these gifts – “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” You have been given certain abilities in order to serve. People are depending on you using your gifts so that they can grow and mature as well. That’s why Paul says, “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, *when each part is working properly*, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

So let me encourage you to think and reflect seriously on how God has gifted you. Do one of these areas resonate with you? Gifting does not mean you have all the skills you need to serve effectively, only that you are “hard-wired” to be better at some of these than others. Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal your gifts to you. Ask other believers as well. And then start finding ways to serve in that area. We’re all counting on you.

Amen.