

*“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, 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, 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. Rather, 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.”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Brenda and I signed up for Disney+ in order to keep up with our children and grandchildren on some of the movies and shows they are watching. While there is a whole host of recent content available, there are also hours and hours of the classic Disney shows. That made me wax nostalgic as I remembered that one of the highlights of the week when I was growing up was to gather as a family on Sunday evening, with a big bowl of popcorn, to watch the *Wonderful World of Disney*. That was in the days when Walt Disney himself still introduced the programs, and they truly were good, wholesome family fare. Just as you thought the show was going to start, an announcer would remind the viewing audience: This program is being brought to you by...and the name of the sponsor or some advertiser was given.

I wonder if we ever realize what it takes to bring you this service on Sunday morning. After all, it doesn't just happen; it is the result of the work and effort of many people. You might even say that this service is sponsored by many different people. For example:

- this service is brought to you by our organist, who uses her musical ability to lead us in worship.
- this service is brought to you by our office administrator, who uses her office skills to prepare the bulletins each week and to help with the administrative needs of our church.
- this service is brought to you by the ushers, who help make this worship service run a little smoother.
- this service is brought to you by our acolyte and by our altar guild, who help prepare God's house for the worship hour.
- this service is brought to you by our caretaker, who works to make God's house an attractive place for us.
- this service is brought to you by our technical team, who run the PowerPoint and sound so that people can participate, and by the individuals who work to provide the service online in these days.
- this service is brought to you by the elders, who help the pastors plan and work for the spiritual welfare of our members.
- this service is brought to you by the members of our church council, who use their differing abilities to carry out the business affairs of the church, and who see that the building is cared for, so that we have a place to worship.
- this service is brought to you by the faithful stewards who have returned to the Lord a portion of what He has first given to them to support the needs of the church.
- this service is brought to you by the pastors, who use the abilities God has given to them to prepare sermons and worship services and lead them for the benefit of God's people.

Yes, it is a long list. The actual work of the church involves many people, all of whom are using the abilities that God has first given to them to work for the good of our whole congregation. There are some I didn't mention in that list, but who have been and who will be part of this list in the future: the Sunday School teachers and our Deaconess who teach the children and encourage them to be part of our worship; the choir members; the lectors. The coffee hosts add another dimension to our gathering, and there are those who look after scheduling and those who tend the flower beds and those who look after the recycling. This service is brought to you by so many who work and serve in their church.

This is exactly the way God intends His church to work. Our text says: *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.* God has called us together in Christ to be a blessing to one another. He has brought us together so that, under His gracious guidance, we can build up one another. He has brought us together and equipped us *for the work of ministry*—a ministry that involves using His gifts to serve and support one another in a way that edifies and encourages each and every member of God's church.

There is an old saying that it takes a village to raise a child. We remember the truth of that adage when we rejoice together at

the Baptism of either a child or an adult. We remember through that blessed washing of water with the Word God has brought us together as one body in Christ, as one family in Christ, to work for the good of one another.

Paul assures us that God has given His church all that is necessary to enable us to minister to and edify one another. In the verses before our text Paul says: ***But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*** (Ephesians 4:7 - ESV) Christ provides for His church. He supplies whatever—and whomever—His church needs for the sake of its growth. But Christ does not invest the needs of the church in a single individual. So Paul tells us: ***“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, 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.”***

Do you realize that you are blessed by Christ so that you can be a blessing to others? The greatest joy we have is knowing that Jesus Christ has redeemed us and freed us from sin and its condemning power. We come together and confess our sins as we did this morning, and hear the promise of forgiveness that the pastor declares in the absolution. We look at the cross at the front of the church and know what Christ has done for us. He gave His life to save us from sin and death. We come to the Lord's Table as Christ comes to us with His body and blood in the bread and wine of communion to assure us once again that He has taken away the sin which would drag us into the depths of hell.

We are alive in Christ! We, who were condemned sinners, are the baptized and redeemed children of God. He has called us as His own and blesses us in His love. The Lord who loved His church with an everlasting love and who gave His own life for us is also the risen and ascended Lord who continues to want the very best for His church. Before His ascension, Jesus promised His disciples: ***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*** (Acts 1:8 - ESV) The Holy Spirit is given to us so that we may have the power to reach out to the lost and dying world around us with the good news of the dying and rising Saviour, who frees all of sinful mankind from the condemnation of sin. But Paul also tells us: ***To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*** (1 Corinthians 12:7 - ESV) The God who has blessed us also blesses us with the power we need to be a blessing to one another. He brings us together through faith in Christ to build up one another, to encourage one another, to pray for one another, to forgive one another, to help and love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the past few years I have begun to have a greater appreciation for Paul's words in our text, especially when he says: ***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.*** It is that “each part working properly” that I realize is so important. My chiropractor reminds me that when one part of my body is out of wack, it will affect other parts. You may be familiar with the idea of ‘off-loading’. Your leg is sore, so you walk to protect it, but that puts strain on other parts. Now they don't work properly, and so on. When even minor joints are stiff or weak, they can have a bigger influence on the whole health of the body than we often realize.

That is why Paul talks about each part of the body working properly. When each part is doing what God enables it to do, the body is strong and healthy and growing. As God's people through faith, brought into His covenant of grace in Jesus Christ, we live for His glory. We exist for the sake of others. We are to be a blessing. God sows seed, and He expects the harvest. Jesus tells us: ***You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.*** (John 15:16 - ESV) We are grafted into Christ, the Vine, so that we can bear fruit. It is only because we have been blessed in Christ that we can be a blessing to others.

And there is no question that you have been blessed. As God provided for His people in the wilderness, so He provides for His people today. You are something wonderful because of God's grace at work in you. Each and every one of us has been given the measure of the Spirit that Christ has determined. But are we using what He has given? The past year and a half has been hard on us as a congregation. We thank and praise God that His Word has been and continues to be proclaimed! Yet we haven't been able to work together as we once did. COVID may not have made us all sick, and yet it has kept us separated and homebound. It has meant we haven't been able to do what we once did. Like our bodies during and after a long illness, we become lethargic, stiff and out of shape. After this long COVID siege, we are going to have to do some rebuilding. Our church body needs to start working its joints and its various parts. We are blessed in Christ to be a blessing to one another. It is only natural for the parts of our body to do what God created them to do. By His grace, the same is true for the church as well. After all, God has blessed you in making you, you. He has equipped you ***for the work of ministry.*** Fed and nourished by the Living Bread ***“who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”*** (John 6:33, ESV) we know that we are blessed to be a blessings to one another through Jesus Christ, our Saviour! Amen.

