

IT TAKES THE WHOLE BODY Ephesians 4:1-14 August 1, 2021
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The seaside village sat in a calm bay but near a treacherous shoreline. When storms arose, slamming boats and ships against the rocks, many boats were destroyed, and many sailors drowned. The villagers were distraught. Since they were fisherman and knew the coastline well, some brave souls brought a rescue boat down to the dangerous area. would row out whenever a storm arose and a ship was scuttled, rescuing many sailors and saving many lives. The number of boats and rescuers increased. Eventually, they built a boat house to keep their boats and warm themselves and those they rescued. Later they built a bigger, fancier building where they could come and gaze at the sea and where they could wait in greater comfort. They organized as a club and kept improving their "clubhouse" adding dinning and drinking services. Fewer and fewer members wanted to risk life and limb going out into the rolling storm blown sea and its crashing waves. Eventually, nobody ventured out. They came and sat and looked at the sea cozy and warm and safe inside. Many lives were lost in the waters off the coast.

There are those who want to have church. They want a nice building, a pastor who is excellent in every way, lots of programs for them and their families, good fellowship with their friends. They love their church and their pastor. Too many Christians are consumers. They want to have church – have church available when they want it and it fits into their schedule. They want their pastor always available and ready to jump to whenever they want or need him or her. They want to come and be fed intellectually, spiritually, and are always ready to be fed physically with good food prepared by fabulous church cooks. In my first congregation, this became obvious. There were more than a few who resented the young pastor having 4 weeks of vacation and let me know it. They wanted me there every Sunday, although they didn't care to be present many Sundays. Along the way of ministry, I learned what every clergyperson and many of you may have discovered: too often it is 20% of the people giving 80% of the budget and 20% of the people doing 80% of the work of the church.

When we want to have church, people are more prone to being disgruntled. There is grumbling about this or that among those who want to have church. When we sit on the sidelines, it is easy to be critical. It is much harder to be in the game. When the members want to have Church, unity, cohesiveness, and effectiveness all suffer. People burn out and too much of the church's most important work is left undone. People are lost, souls are left unsaved, spiritual growth doesn't happen.

Paul is most concerned about the unity of the congregation at Ephesus and all Christian communities of faith. That's the first part of our passage today. He urges, begs us as Christians to lead a life worthy of our calling – to remember that we have been called as disciples, followers of Jesus. Our first duty is to live in the way of our Lord. Each of us has been called to behaviors that create community and build up the church. Paul names a few: humility as opposed to narcissism, gentleness rather than being harsh, controlling our anger and our tongue rather than spewing venom, patience with ourselves and each other, while bearing with other's idiosyncrasies and differences as well as joys and burdens. Paul wants us to live in community in ways that create and maintain unity and peace. To this end, he reminds us "There is one body and one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all." (verses 4-5) All of us have this responsibility.

Paul does not believe in "Having Church". There is no such thing for him. He believes that we are to "Be" Church. Christ's church is not people resting, receiving, and being served. It is people growing in faith and engaged in ministry. Paul says that when Christ returned to heaven, he not only freed us all from captivity to our sin and fear and death, but he gave us gifts... talents and skills and abilities to be used in his Church, his ministry, his mission. Every Christian has gifts active or latent with which the Lord has endowed us. They are to be developed and used. Leaders, both clergy and lay leaders, are to fulfill their calling to equip the saints, teach, show, and support them toward maturity of faith and in practicing their gifts. Of course, it means that members of the body of Christ must be willing to be taught, giving time and energy to learn and grow and practice their gifts. We are not baptized to remain babies, cared for and coddled, but to grow up so that we are people who share the faith, teach others the faith, create fellowship, maintain the church, do mission and service. It won't work without all of us engaged and involved. Churches lag when only a few are doing ministry and serving Christ; churches flourish and are effective when the whole church is attending, learning, involved and serving.

At the end of this passage as he did in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us that the church is a body – the body of Christ. Without every part working according to its gifts, talents, abilities and faith, the body is weak...it is sick, most of all it is not the Church as Christ called us to be. Some talk about Spiritual Gifts and there are such but to limit our gifts to those listed is to limit Christ in what he gives and what he can use. I spoke about my father and Rebecca's father. My dad couldn't stand in front of the congregation and say anything. He became tongue tied. But he was a deacon in the Southern Presbyterian Church and he put on new roofs when the church needed them

and fixed the boiler when it broke. Rebecca's dad was very quiet. He hardly said two words to me in our first six months of dating, but he taught a Sunday school class as a younger man. After he retired at 65, he honed his turning skills. Yet he steadfastly refused to sell any of them and only after he turned 90 and his wife said he needed to did he even start allowing his children to have any. At his funeral, we found out from the pastor something we didn't know; every time there was a church fundraiser, he donated some of his bowls to the cause.

Brothers and sisters, we are each called and gifted to be in ministry. Without us the Church is not Christ's church, and it fails to fulfill its calling. To be church means we get off the couch and into the pew. We get off the bench and back into the game. We don't hide our gifts or let them atrophy but develop and use the gifts Christ has given each one of us. It is time to put behind HAVING CHURCH and time to BE CHURCH for the sake of our souls and others, for Christ and his Church, for our God and his world.