

Empower Servant Leadership

Ephesians 4:1-16

Rev. Dexter Kearny

Longview Presbyterian Church

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I therefore, the **prisoner** in the Lord, 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 Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he 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**, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to **maturity**, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must **grow up** in every way into him 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.**

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

I love to be in control. I like to know exactly where things are, how things are going to happen, what people are feeling. I want to know all the details. I want to be fully in control of myself and know exactly what is going to happen around me. This is why birds scare me. They are so unpredictable! One minute they are waddling away and then they fly up at your face! Or maybe you're walking to your car and they start dive bombing your head. Or maybe you are going for a run with a loved one and geese walk across the path and won't let you by, making that threatening head bob at you and hissing! I mean I am sure those things have probably happened to someone...

This loss of control is something I have been feeling very heavily these last few weeks. Everything has been turned on its head. You start planning for one thing and then another wrench gets thrown. It has left me in the lurch and causes me extra stress. But perhaps that can also be a silver lining in these times. Perhaps we need to learn to rely on others. Perhaps we need to learn to give up control. Perhaps we need to learn to empower servant leaders.

These three words that make up our Vital Mark of the day all have to do with giving up control. To empower someone requires that you give away some of your power so that they can step up and do their thing. Servanthood requires a humble posture of trusting another person, lifting up their needs and concerns, and

working for another's well being. And when you pair these with leadership, you start to see a pattern of what leadership is meant to be. To empower servant leadership, therefore, means that we lead by helping others use their gifts and lead as well.

This requires us to give up control. We have to trust God. The one God who is a parent to us all as Paul says. And we have to trust others. Letting other people's gifts and skills come to the forefront. Knowing that they may do it differently than you would, knowing that they may make mistakes along the way, knowing that through all these things you may have to step back. Because by doing these things we encourage the equipping of the saints and the building up of the body of Christ that Paul is talking about in our scripture today.

Paul understands giving up control. He is a prisoner while he is writing this letter and has been a prisoner many times in his life. All he has is the ability to write a letter to this church and hope the people follow his instructions. Paul has to trust that God is at work in this community and that the community is working with all humility, gentleness, and patience.

God has given us a variety of gifts and Paul calls out some of those here and calls out more in other places. The point of a variety of gifts is that we all have something we can bring to make this world a better place. When only one or two

people are leading or taking control, it leads to a diminishing of what church can and should be. When ministry is left only in the hands of the few, only a few will ever experience grace and love. But when it is shared amongst the whole, many more will experience this love. When all are working together, using their unique gifts, can the body actually grow as Paul talks about here. “We must **grow up** in every way into him 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.”

You, my friends, are the church. Without you and your unique perspectives, gifts, and skills, the world is missing out. We are not whole. We need you.

I would like to end my sermon this week, by splitting up into small groups. I invite you to discuss these three questions:

What gifts do you bring to church and to the world?

Do you feel like you are using them?

What is one way you can use your gifts in this time for the lifting up of others?

I will split you up into groups. If you are watching this later, I invite you to pause the video and reflect on these questions. And by sharing our gifts in community, we make known the reality of God’s love in our world. Amen.

