

The Reverend Mark S. Merrill

August 6, 2006

Job Done One

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

August 5 & 6, 2006

Back in 1972 Richard Avery & Donald Marsh wrote the hymn, “We Are the Church”. The words are:

The Church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people. We’re many kinds of people with many kinds of faces, all colors and all ages, too, from all times and places.

And when the people gather there’s singing and there’s praying, there’s laughing and there’s crying sometimes, all of it saying: I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together! All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we’re the church together.

In their own way Avery and Marsh are reflecting on the words from Ephesians. Yes, the church is people, many kinds of people, many kinds of different people. We are people with different gifts, talents and abilities, all needed so that Christ’s work in the church can be done. We cannot do Christ’s work only on our own as individuals. We are dependent upon each other and all who make up the living organism that is the church, which has Christ as its head.

It is generally agreed that Paul is dealing with the following in chapters 4-6 of Ephesians--how we are to live as members of the church. Our day to day behavior is to match our status as members of Christ’s body, the church. Our conduct is to manifest the Christ-like qualities in verse 2 – humility, gentleness, patience and love. Others have written it this way :

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...patiently put up with each other and love each other; practice humility & discipline, steadily pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love; be quick at mending fences; show your love by being tolerant with one another; be charitable; be humble, always gentle, and patient too, putting up with one another’s feelings in the spirit of love; support each other in love, making allowances for one another because you love one another.

We are to live out these qualities to maintain the unity of the body that the Holy Spirit creates. A. M. Hunter has described the basis for this unity in his commentary:

Seven times he repeats the word ‘one’, each time attaching to it a different noun. The result is a sevenfold battle cry of Christian unity. Note how this foundation for unity

begins in the unity of the Church, goes on to the unity of Christ, and culminates in the unity of God:

‘One body...one Spirit...one hope’ – that is, one holy Fellowship, one life-giving Spirit informing it, and one goal on which its hope is set.

‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism’ – that is, one Savior to be worshiped and adored; one pledge or confession of trust in him; one rite of initiation into his Fellowship.

‘One God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all’ – that is, the divine Father and Author of all in the threefoldness of God’s unity.

Professor Hunter goes on to write about those “things on which Christians all over the world are united. All Christians of all races worship the same God and Father. All confess Christ as

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Savior and Lord. All share the same hope of salvation. All avow the primacy of the law of love. And, whatever form their worship takes, one Spirit is assured to all who meet in the name of Christ.”

In Ephesians Paul then goes on to write about the diversity of the Church, the body of Christ, in its unity. We all have different offices, responsibilities, but each contributes to the unity and work of the church. EACH Christian has a particular gift of grace from God. Yes, Christ has given people varying gifts. And the gifts have been and are given in order to equip the people of Christ for the work of serving, leading to the building up of the body of Christ - the church.

Again, Professor Hunter has written – the idea of Church is not so much individuals on their own faith journeys, but is as “a single organism growing to its full strength and becoming fit for the purpose which God intended for it. Each member contributes to the growth of the whole by receiving and passing on the life drawn from Christ, the Head.”

It has been pointed out many times that the unity and harmony of the Church depends upon the capacity of individual Christians to love one another and others. Christ based unity will show itself in love, in putting up with each other.

One of the writers for the *LectioAid* magazine has contributed the following:

In the family film called *The War*, Vietnam veteran Steven is unemployed due to damage to his mind because of his war experiences. He nonetheless strives to instill in his family a sense of dignity and love. Living in a small town in Mississippi, he is successful in keeping his 2 children free of prejudice. When Lydia expresses doubts about angels and heaven, Steven shares his belief with her. To her older brother

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Stu, Steven teaches non-violence. This is needed, because the children are involved in a war of their own with the tough Lipnicki children over possession of a tree house. The Lipnicki’s, the wild offspring of the owner of the local junkyard pick on Stu when he is alone at the county fair. Steven had left him to go and buy themselves cotton candy. Steven returns with the cotton candy and breaks up the fight Stu is engaged in with one of the Lipnicki boys. As he talks with his son, he looks over at the youngest Lipnicki children sitting on steps and glaring over at them. He takes the cotton candy and strides up to them.

The girl and boy shrink back as if they expect him to strike them. But there is no hostility in what he does next. He hands them the cotton candy and walks away. The angry Stu asks: ‘Why did you do that?’ His father replies,

“Because it looks as if no one had done anything for them for a long time.’ It will be a long time before Stu understands what his father has done. It was only junk food, but in his generous act of love, Steven was offering it to those who needed love most, two abused children who had known little love in their short lives.

Steven is living out the love Paul wrote about. We realize that it is not just in our “ministry” work at/for the church that we are to live out our giftedness and the fruits of the Spirit. We are to do this daily that we may reinforce these in our own living and set an example for others, as Steven did to and for his children. We are not only to speak the truth in love, we are to do the truth in love. Dr. Markus Barth wrote of it this way in his commentary on Ephesians:

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If to love includes bearing one’s neighbors, then love is not just an emotion. There is no love except in relation to specific neighbors. Love is always specific, always costly, always a miraculous event.

Christ-based unity does not try to hide or get rid of the general diversity, disagreements, divisions, even animosity that are within the Church, as is only so evident in reports in the media. It realizes that even with this “disharmony” there can be unity, because the unifying power is that of the spirit of Christ. Earl S. Johnson, Jr., in his commentary, put it this way:

Sometimes life in the Church is not easy and believers have to tolerate one another and overlook annoying faults.... Love is the key component, the best gift of the Spirit and the most important fruit of the Spirit.

Our diversity obviously reflects the different gifts Christ has given us. Professor Lewis R. Donelson has written in his commentary:

It is often argued that Paul, and here Ephesians, uses the body imagery to argue that Christ takes our diverse natural gifts and creates a new unity out of them. It would be as though we bring our talents to the church and, through the power of the Spirit, Christ molds them into the miraculous unity that is the church. That may be a true insight, but that is not the point of Paul nor that in Ephesians. Rather, the unified body needs diversity in order to function. Thus Christ apportions diverse gifts to the community. Note what the gifts are; some are apostles, some prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.... One does not bring apostleship to the community from outside, as

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though one could be born with the status, rather, apostleship grows out of the needs of the body, out of the power of the Spirit.

It is the same for all the gifts enumerated here. Though the list is confined to people in leadership roles, the goal is the upbuilding of the entire body, which in turn does the larger ministry of Christ.

Again, Earl S. Johnson, Jr., has written of this with these words:

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to individual members of the body of Christ – given freely by (grace) and by the measure of Christ. Each person receives these gifts according to his or her God-given abilities and the needs of the church. Each Christian is

not given every gift of the Spirit. God imposes limits on what each receives. So we need to be united and work together for the body to have all the parts it needs.

We don't all look, speak, and/or act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ each of us is given our own gift. You see, the many gifts received by the people of the church are an outflow of the one great gift of God – Jesus the Christ, God's only son. The Phillips translation of the Bible has it this way:

Naturally, there are different gifts and functions. Individually grace is given to us in different ways out of the rich diversity of Christ's giving.

In a series in *These Days* devotional magazine series, Mary Duckert, a noted church educator, wrote:

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I accepted the challenge once of teaching 14 and 15 year olds at church. Five of the group had gone through 9 years together and many teachers in that congregation. The church had been given a house for youth activities. Those 5 young people decided unilaterally that our class would get it ready to use. The trustees had other plans.

After a struggle the young people were given a job and began to work with enthusiasm. They soon found out that they lacked expertise with tools. We went out on the front porch for a talk. At that point a long-retired church member came by in his motorized wheelchair. He turned into the yard for a chat and was a godsend. He knew exactly what to do and how to do it.

'We need a boss,' one of the boys said. 'Just tell us what to do and we'll do it.'

'I can't get up the steps.'

'We'll carry you,' another said, 'You do what you can do, so that we can do what we're supposed to do.'

'That's the church,' said the veteran of many years in it. And only with his help did we finish the job.

Both the youth and the older man truly were living out our scripture lesson for today. They realized that they needed each other to get the job done.

No one is blessed with every gift that is needed for the work of Christ through the church to get done.

Those in need were mature enough to acknowledge and express the need. And the one with the gift/talent was gracious enough to offer the gift to those needing it.

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Mary Duckert also wrote,

As we accept Christ's gifts to the church, we serve one another in distinctly different ways. ... When we ask why, the answer is, 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry' (vs, 12).

The saints to be equipped are all of us with all the gifts Christ gave to the church. Age in itself is no barrier to the work of the ministry.

The preschoolers who sing in the nursing home, the retired men and women who tend gardens with children and young people, the nursing home residents who pray from their beds all demonstrate unity of the Spirit as it thrives in the church.

From where we are in life, from who we are, and for what is needed in the work of ministry, Christ graces each one of us with a gift or gifts. As the human body needs each and every part doing its function to make it a properly working body, so the body of Christ, the church, needs each of its parts using its gift for the work of the church to get done. It matters not what our gift is and so our role, task, and/or responsibility in the church. What matters is that each one of us fulfills this so we can get the job/jobs Christ wants and expects of us done. He is counting on us.

Rusty Edwards shares his understanding of Paul's vision for the church and its members in his hymn, 'We All Are One in Mission' #435:

We are all one in mission,
we all are one in call,
Our varied gifts united
by Christ the Lord of all.
A single, great commission

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compels us from above
To plan and work together
that all may know Christ's love.

We all are called for service
to witness in God's name;
Our ministries are different,
our purpose is the same.
To touch the lives of others
by God's surprising grace
So every folk and nation
may feel God's warm embrace.

Now let us be united
and let our song be heard
Now let us be a vessel
for God's redeeming word.
We are all one in mission,
we all are one in call,
Our varied gifts united
by Christ, the Lord of all.