

Ephesians 4:1-16 (NLT)

TALENTS: 5-fold Ministry in Unity

So, we continue with stewardship and this week we consider our talents – talents can be described as the gifts, skills and abilities given to us by God that are then used to serve the church as God guides us – to achieve worship, witness and service to God’s glory.

In a sense, talents are tied up with next week’s theme of Time, and perhaps we might dip back into what is said today next week.

But for now, I want us to draw on what we have to offer of ourselves – to give to our church from our own abilities?

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Yesterday we had the church conference where we considered Ephesians 4. You almost would have thought I planned to preaching on it today 😊, and so for those who couldn’t make it we’re going to get a little of yesterday’s input and how it relates to every single one of you here.

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church he moves from the first three chapters where he summarises the Good News of God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ, and then moves onto practical instruction – how believers are to respond to Jesus.

He starts in chapter four – with knowledge that those who love Jesus are a prisoner to him. In most senses being a prisoner isn't a great thing, but here it is not – being a prisoner called to life worthy of our calling.

What does that look like – what is our calling, and is it the same for all of us?

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Paul is taking us back to the basic instructions of our faith.

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Who here when you have got a new computer, or a new car spends time reading through the instruction manual?

... or do you just set up the computer and start to use it, or get behind the wheel and work it out for yourself – maybe referring to the manual when you find something you're not sure how to work?

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Sometimes we need to go back to the basics in our faith, to read, to understand the fundamental instructions – and in this section of Ephesians Paul is doing just that... taking the readers back to their calling – not an individual calling, in the sense of one person is called to be a nurse or doctor, another a teacher or mechanic or whatever it is...

but to the basic calling of all Christians.

For all who are saved in Christ are called to the same mission of God, which is to go and make disciples.

However, not all are equally equipped.

We have different backgrounds, experiences and skill sets – both acquired and God given (though perhaps there is not much difference as everything comes from God).

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So, our mission as church is to make disciples – to grow the Kingdom, to transmit the Gospel, though not all of us have the same role - but yet we are called to be one church – united.

The calling of the gospel is to summon people to believe in Jesus as risen Lord and king, and to follow him in loyalty – this bringing His followers back time and again to celebrate, to maintain and to guard their unity.

A big ask in a world that so prizes the individual – a world that celebrates diversity and individuality over unity.

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So, what unites us – well biblically it should be humbleness, gentleness, patience, peace and love – fruit of the spirit.

It is through the Spirit we are bought to unity – through a bond of peace.

So, unity of the church is Spirit led.

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I wonder – are we such a church?

Last Saturday I felt so – the womens conference was on fire, the fire of the Spirit was upon this place, but at other times I don't always think it is so.

There are elements of our church and practice that conspire against us allowing God to work His will and way for us in the power of the Spirit.

I wonder what the concern is, because I feel there is one – are folk worried they might get carried away... wonder that we might start being called into things that get us out of our comfort zone? That the Spirit may lead us in new ways, into new areas of ministry – that make us uncomfortable – then good – that's as it should be.

We are not called to sit back and be comfortable – but to serve, to follow and lead others on the straight, narrow and often difficult path...

And it's Holy Spirit that leads us – one spirit and one body, one church - UNITY

Called in unity of

- one hope – that is in the Lord Jesus Christ
- one Lord – just forget any other thoughts about supposed Gods or idols
- one faith – in Him, there is no other

- one baptism – in the name of Jesus, receiving His grace and forgiveness of sin

Oneness / Unity is found in the One God (Father, Son and Spirit) – the true God, sovereign God who stands over all – this is what we have in common – this is our unity and our strength.

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But biblical unity is not about being produced from a cookie cutter mold – for each of us is unique, each an individual

In 1 Corinthians Paul writes...

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

One church, made up of individuals, with our own experiences and personalities and gifts... but still part of one – the body of Christ?

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So, a question - sure you show up on a Sunday, but are you plugged in? Really part of the one body?

Almost two years into my ministry I wonder are we one body?

Pulling in one direction for one purpose?

And I ask God, and don't hear an answer.

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We're on a journey as I mentioned last week – but it is a journey fraught with dangers – with spiritual dangers.

Stay with me a moment on this train of thought...

I don't know where you stand on the danger of evil – but let me share this ...

There is evil.

There is the devil / satan – call him what you will.

And there is a spiritual battle...

...and if we want to follow Christ, if we really want to honour him, serve him, and do kingdom work – then we will come under attack.

I know Emma and I have come under such attack in the last three months or so, and I know of others in our congregation who are suffering such attack too.

Oh, I might hear some of you say - that's just life – it has ups and downs, good and bad and it's just coincidence surely.

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Let me tell you – NO.

The devil is real; spiritual attack is real and the need for warriors in spiritual warfare is paramount in our church.

We need a praying church and we need it now. I have been plugging prayer as central to the healthy life of our church through the last year and a half, in fact to all we do as church

and as individuals – but I really don't yet see any real growth and movement in that direction.

I wonder if you are thinking – this is a bit heavy Pastor Mike – this isn't what I come to church for.

Well sorry – the message sometimes needs to be unvarnished, as received by me, and the last couple of weeks God has been paying on my heart that we are in a battle – there are those who would fight against the Kingdom of God and we who follow Christ can be the target...

... and I hate to say sometimes consent to such behaviour in our church and maybe in our own lives too.

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I have reached the point coming up to two years here where I say enough.

We need to be a church that gets on our knees and repent.

That seeks God and his calling on our lives.

That says Jesus Christ – you died that I might be forgiven – you gave so much for me - what can I give in return.

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We must be seeking Christian maturity – whatever stage of our journey we are on – be that the Christian faith journey or the physical journey of human life.

We need be asking of God to make us a church mature in the faith...

... Paul writes

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Do you hear those last words – ‘from him the whole body’ – yes you, I, the person sitting next to you or behind you or in front –

we the church are the body – joined together / held together as we grow – in other words growing to be mature – IN LOVE – as each part does it’s work

As EACH PART DOES ITS WORK...

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What is your work for the Kingdom?

What is the gift God has given you for His church?

How are you good stewards of what you have to offer?

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I would say the Church has been negligent of the gifts of God's people over many years.

We have sought people to be elders, not always based on their spiritual life.

We have sought people to look after our kids during service – not always based on their spiritual life and gifts.

We have sought office bearers – treasurers / property convenors / singers and musicians and for many other roles based on our needs to fill rolls – and maybe not on spiritual life and gifts.

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Is that what church should look like – getting people to serve because we need a space filling... or should we / should you as church be recognising your gifts / your talents and step forward in service – stewarding your gifts for God.

But what gifts...

We hear in Paul's words about the gifts of the Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher, but for many years the church has ignored some of these gifts – the five-fold ministry.

For far too long church has been pastor / teacher led and has lacked the gifts or at least the recognition and acceptance of the gifts of apostles, prophets and evangelists.

To revive our church, we need spirit-led people with all the gifts of God in His church... so what are these gifts?

Apostles – *extend the Gospel*: transmit down the generations / bridging barriers / developing leadership | others / networking. WATCH – if unchecked can leave others behind

Prophets – *know God's will*: attuned to His truth today / correct and challenge assumptions / question the status quo. WATCH – can become belligerent activist or other worldly

Evangelist – *recruit*: infectious communicators of the Gospel. Call others to respond to God's redemption in Christ and draw believers into the mission of the church. WATCH – potential to neglect those inside the church

Shepherd – *nurture and protect*: caregivers of the community focusing | protection and spiritual maturity of God's flock – making and developing disciples. WATCH – value stability to detriment of mission, and unhealthy dependence on church

Teachers – *understand and explain*: Communicate God's truth and wisdom and help others remain biblically grounded to better discern God's will and understanding of doctrine. WATCH – do not fall into dogma or dry intellectualism, or may fail to see missional aspects of ministry.

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Yesterday, at the church conference the attendees did a test which revealed their strengths – go visit it yourself and do the test

www.fivefoldsurvey.com

- It would be great to know where the gifts of our church lie – who leans toward teacher – the ones who understand and explain
- who are the prophets - - pointing us to God's will
- who are the Apostles – the leaders extending the Gospel
- who the Shepherds – caring, nurturing and protecting God's flock ... AND
- who are the evangelists – the recruiters to God's kingdom.

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One thing I do know – we as church face a challenge today – a challenge that is spiritual warfare – we must be prepared, armed, shielded and protected through prayer...

And we need to join – to be family, one body – UNITED in our gifting.

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I am though completely aware that these are just words – without action they mean nothing.

It was pointed out to me this week that I need to model it also – leadership from the front so to speak...

And the comment made me draw breath, consider – do I model it.

Do I get out there and attempt to be family, one body - united –

.. and though many of you might not see me other than on a Sunday; or ask to meet for coffee and I can't fit you in for a few weeks because of busyness – know this...

I do meet folk, I do visit, I do chew the fat over a coffee and listen... in spite of the fact that Shepherd / Pastor is 4th placed on my gifts.

I am an Apostle / Teacher with leanings toward Evangelism...
... that's me, and there is only one of me....

Church needs us all to step up

Church is the whole body of Christ – each and every one of you.

Are you joined into the body?

Will you play your part?

Will you live the life to which God calls you, and will you put aside the distractions and worldly ways that pull your spirit

down and open you to spiritual attack and attack upon your church?

Will you serve Him and His church?

Be the Body God calls us to be

Amen