

## **Empowering Leadership**

### **Ephesians 4: 1-16**

**April 06, 2008**

My memory's not as sharp as it used to be. And also, my memory's not as sharp as it used to be. It was on a Wednesday, the day before my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, on March 15, 1961, a group of scholars met in Westminster Abby in London to receive the results of 13 years of difficult work in translating the NT from the Greek language into a new version of the Bible. The ceremony in this beautiful place was attended by the archbishop of Canterbury, Queen Elizabeth along the entire royal family. They said that this new version was given over to the people. It was called the New English Version and I have been reading that version myself for the last 15 years in the morning. Three hundred years before that, the KJV had been given over to the people. Amidst all the pageantry, impressive liturgy, and exquisite music was a brand new Bible. The great scholar C.H. Dodd climbed up to the pulpit up to read the one text for that service. Which text in all of the New Testament would be read on that auspicious occasion? It was the one I am going to read to you now. Listen to the Word of God from the NRSV.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup>But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." <sup>9</sup>(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended<sup>o</sup> into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>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 Spring we are considering something called Natural Church Development. This is a diagnostic tool that enables improving the health of the church. The NCD indicates that there are eight areas that have been found to be essential to healthy church growth. This spring sermon series will consider these eight areas one at a time beginning today.

The first quality characteristic of the list of eight is empowering leadership. I did not say empowered leadership but empowering leadership.

Empowered leadership can mean that one individual has been given the authority to run the church. Empowering leadership means that the leadership seeks to help others also act as the leaders God has called them to be. In order to explain this concept from its roots, I refer us to this passage we have just read

The letter to the Ephesians like most all of the letters of the New Testament contains **two sections**: chapters 1-3 are about what Christians believe and chapters 4-6 addresses how Christians behave. Two parts: theology and ethics; doctrine and practice, affirmation and application, the talk and the walk, lip and life, the truth and identity and calling. Those who pray Thy kingdom come must also return their grocery carts back where they belong. There is to be a seamless transition between what we believe and how we behave.

We have great affirmation in the first chapter, like this: *He chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. And God raised us up with Christ and sealed us with him in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show us the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* Then in the third chapter, he shares a prayer that includes this line, *And I pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power together with all the saints that you might know how wide and high and deep is the love of God and to know that this love is that which surpasses all knowledge - that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* You see that God loves us so much that he wants to be with him always. What is the greatest thing a young man can say to a young woman? *You are beautiful.* Oh, she appreciates that. *You are so intelligent, so smart.* She appreciates that. *You have a wonderful, delightful personality,* oh she loves to hear that. He may even say, *you are the greatest person I have ever met. It is such an honor to be with you.* Oh that makes her heart sing and rejoice. But there is something else than can be said; that is a far greater affirmation than all of that put together, and that is, *would you spend the rest of your life with me?* That question trumps all the other affirmations in insignificance because if after saying all of that he says, *hey great to meet you, see ya.* No, he says that he cannot imagine being able to survive without her, he will swim the widest ocean, he will climb the highest mountain to win her. Well, that is something like what God has done in his love for his people.

He want us to be with him forever but in order for us to be with him forever, he will have to change us into new kinds of creatures that can live on his level as his kind of being. That remaking involve a specific personal identity carried out in what is termed a calling. The calling is about a position of leadership that reveals God. We are to so live in whatever we do with our time, that reveals God in how we do what we do in the workplace, the classroom, in the neighborhood.

The very first verse that heads this practical section is, As a prisoner for the Lord, **I beg you to live a life worthy of your calling.** I encourage you to give that as an answer to someone who asks how you are doing this week, *How are you? Well, I am seeking to live a life worthy of my calling.*

Instead of just saying fine, what would happen if we said something like, *well I am busy living into the kind of person who God wants me to be, and I believe there is some progress alright, but I am not there yet.*

The point is that ALL Christians have a new identity, all Christians have a calling, all Christians are to serve God with their own ministry with the gifts God has given them, all Christians are ministers, all Christians have are to reach others, all Christians are to be trained to serve God through what they do vocationally or with their use of time, ALL Christians are to lead other toward and to Christ. IF we refuse to do that by avoiding sharing him with those we know, we not only effectively communicating that Christ is not who he said he was, we are confirming them as lost, and denying our own personal identity.

In verse 12 of Ephesians 4, Paul calls everyone in the church a saint. He does this in others of his letters. He calls the Corinthian Christians saints yet he does agree with all of them.

Certain Christians are given a calling to help others fulfill, develop, actualize their calling. But their vocational calling is no more important than the calling of others. One way to avoid acting out of one's calling is to over-emphasize the calling of some to the virtual exclusion of the calling of others. I am not comfortable with how much is made out of the calling of clergy in church and the calling of others is entirely ignored. I think a student who graduates from school and goes into profession should have some kind of service in the church where she is member, no matter where she graduates, beautician college or Ivy league medical school. The church needs to honor the scripture and start giving recognition, celebration, and certification to all jobs, all professions, all positions that are a calling of God, not unlike the clergy that we over-emphasize to the detriment of the whole church.

The calling of all Christians is life long. There is no retirement program in the call of God. In fact, I say this as a senior citizen, if there is a most important time of your calling, and I am not sure there is, but it would get more important with time. In other words the older you get the more you need to be most yourself, most engaged in ministry that God called you to perform, with or without a position, job, role, task, or assignment.

Everyone who is a Christian has a calling. The calling is something supplied by God. We are not given salvation to get a free ticket to heaven. We are given salvation to be with God and serve him in the world with whatever vocation we have. **This is not about getting more people to be active in the church. It is about getting each member to be themselves.** Calling is about being the kind of person God calls you to be with a role to play and then tasks to do to act out of that role. We need everyone to be themselves for the person's sake individually and for the church only secondarily. We do everyone a favor that we invite into leadership or leadership training.

**To be with God is to be with God in what God is up to.** God calls us to join him in what he is doing. But what God is up to is so large that we cannot do that by ourselves. We cannot do that alone. We are to do that with others. The calling is lifelong, it is for a service to God and then to others. Life is a contributive process. We are not to do a task, alone, we are to do the task with other people so how we are organized with them and how we relate to them has everything to do with accomplishing the task that God calls us to do.

In verse 13, we read the goal of the calling process and that is to become **mature**. The maturity we have in Christ is unlike the maturity of individualism in society where a person can be mature in his own right. In Christ, maturity is seen as the capacity to be oneself in and through relationships. **No one of us has it all together, but together we have it all.** I have witnessed a number of incredibly gifted, brilliant, off the charts talented, stand alone, people in the churches that I have served. I stand in awe of them. But they are often immature. That is, while they are great as individuals, they are less competent taking their place as amongst equals in the body of Christ, and can reduce the work of God by making themselves the locus of points, instead of Christ.

A key word in our reading is the word **equip**. That is too anemic a translation in English. It is only used here in the NT and it is derived from a verb that means to set a broken bone back in place. In Greek politics it meant joining together opposing factions so that a government could function. It is also used to mend nets of fisherman. . It was used to discipline an offending person until he is fit to be placed back into the fellowship of the church. The idea is to put something back into working condition so it could do its part again. Someone who is equipped is certainly one who is educated and trained for a task,

God gave us the means of doing that and the language for those tools are gifts. I think what is described is gifts. This implies that it is a privilege to serve others. It is a privilege to have someone serve you, it is a privilege to serve Christ. This is next week's subject

There is no such things as a volunteer in the kingdom of God. A volunteer is one who chooses what he does, does it as an extra thing, and regards it as optional. So, we do not need volunteers in church. We need all kinds of help, but the people who are to help are called. This means they help because to do so carries out their own identity.

We are all leaders who know Christ and are to express our love for God by our empowering others to also know, love, and serve the Lord. We heard the words. *And I pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power together*

God is doing something in the world and he wants helpers to pull it off. If God is doing something, you can be sure that it is something that would be worth your time. I believe that it is an honor to be engaged in serving God in the world.. You will have to trust me when I say this and I hope you will believe me. I am not saying that it is honor to serve God because I happen to be employed in serving God in a church. Kind of like a basketball coach saying that basketball is the greatest sport. I say it whether or not I am involved personally in it or not. It is the truth. I believe that my hometown Camarillo, California has a nice climate. National Geographic did a survey of the world's greatest climates and my hometown tried for first. Just because I am from there, it can still have a nice climate even if I say so. Serving God is the highest honor a person can have, even though I happen to be involved with that also. I read about a retired pastor who said that his greatest regret was the he did not share the ministry with more people. I do not want to look back and have that regret. I do not want to hog the privilege of serving God but want to be an empowering leader.

Why did God give apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers?

4:12. To prepare God's people for works of service, so that, for the purpose of, building up the body of Christ. Those of us who are employed by the church are to equip the saints.

**How is our church doing at encouraging, enabling, equipping, and empowering EACH MEMBER to serve Jesus Christ?** I have been seeking to build an internal culture that opens the ministry to more and more members as leaders in this church.

I am asking all Christians this morning to be empowering leaders. This is because that is what we are shown most of all by Jesus himself. A leader is first a follower of Jesus Christ. All followers of Christ are to lead others to him, and through him encourage them to lead others in turn. A leader empowers others to serve our Lord . Jesus made extraordinary leaders out of ordinary people. He saw the potential within them, and he invested in their lives with the belief that God had something special for them. As we embody the spirit of Christ, we need to empower others to become all that God intends them to be. We need to give others the opportunity to flourish with our guidance and care. We need to share the load with others who are gifted in areas we are not. We must affirm the call of God to one another. We dare not hold others back from their place of service by presuming only WE can do certain things. We are called to help everyone we know to also know, love and follow Jesus Christ.

<p><b>THIS SERMON WAS WRITTEN FOR ORAL PRESENTATION AND THEREFORE CONTAINS GRAMMATICAL FORMS THAT ARE UNACCEPTABLE IN WRITTEN ENGLISH</b></p>
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