

Growing Up

Ephesians 4: 11-16

¹¹Christ himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until 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. ¹⁴We 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; ¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from 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.

When we began renovating the sanctuary a couple summers ago, the workers would come in and out. Sawdust landing on the pews from the carpenters, wires were poking out from the electricians, painters with their big cloths draped over the piano. Occasionally, the head contractor would come in—with Bill Raiford of course—to troubleshoot or see how things were coming along. And we've been enjoying their creation. Our capital campaign gifts were used to hire their gifts which then in turn set the stage for our gifts again. Our gifts are circular in nature—to be given and received and given again. The writer in Ephesians uses a building metaphor to describe how God's Spirit is activated within us. Says that Christ is like a head contractor who—with Bill Raiford of course—pulls people's gifts together to build community which sets the stage for the cycle of unity and truth and love to be shared with the world.

So begin by thinking about your gift. It doesn't have to be profound. It could be as simple as our youth rushing back after worship to serve us coffee. Or as simple as writing nametags every week so we know who each other are underneath our masks. Maybe you are good with numbers, or words, or landscaping, or art, or melodies. Could be spiritual or practical. Perhaps the gift you're thinking of might have nothing to do with church at all. Thank God for the gift of the poll workers, and listening counselors and patient teachers who have been on the front lines of our collective anxiety. Whatever gift you are thinking of, it is being used to help bring God's peace, love and justice into the world. And Trinity is abundant with gifts.

So notice what Ephesians also says the result of using our gifts is: yes, they are used to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Yes, we can contribute to something bigger than ourselves. Yes, they are used to form unity. But the result is we grow. Notice: not grow bigger. Not more butts in the seats or getting people saved. But growing up in trusting we are beloved. Becoming more secure and less frazzled when the next issue hits the news cycle. We grow up in faith, which James Alison calls "relaxing into the presence." After all, the Greek word for faith isn't about assenting to beliefs, it's about deepening our trust.

If we look back at what we were doing a couple of years ago, it seemed like we had an upward trajectory. We were launching a successful capital campaign, our children were leading worship once a month, our leaders were having potlucks with the transgender support group who was meeting here. We were about to meet in pubs to have some fun conversations which always

become more honest when pints are involved. And then, poof!...the pandemic...and just like that it all changed.

And yet, dare I say, while it might seem like we've plateaued in some ways, the pandemic forced us to grow up in others. For some of us we had to let go of some expectations and simply. For others, our growing edge was learning how to navigate technology to stay connected. For others, we changed how church functioned in our lives. Since Covid, our committees met less or over email, or not at all. Our worship services got shorter. We could worship on Facebook while on vacation or crocheting or woodcarving. In the clearing we let go of the "have to's" and "should's" and as a result we grew up in different ways.

During my sabbatical, when I took three months off of church (and no, I didn't go to church most Sundays) I came back with a new mindset. Before the sabbatical, what I call the first season of my calling here, it was about growing numbers and proving to you all that I was worthy of this calling. But during sabbatical—when I had some space— I grew up. Now in this second season I've had a revelation: my job—our job—isn't about attracting people. It's about sharing good news and opening up a bit more, and relaxing into God and ourselves and trusting that what the present moment brings is enough. You see, my job is to equip the saints to help you grow deeper into who you already are because the truth is: y'all are already pretty great just as you are! And if we can foster our gifts to relax deeper into who we already are then...as Ephesians says, "we will be working properly, promoting each other's growth in building ourselves up in love."

Have you ever watched the Pixar movie *Encanto*? *Encanto* is about a family who lives in a magical house where each member of the family is given a special gift. Pepa can control the weather. Luisa has super-human strength. Bruno can read the future—but we don't talk about Bruno! All their gifts are used to serve the community-at-large. The twist is, the main character in the story, Mirabel, doesn't have a special gift. She keeps trying to prove she belongs because everyone has a gift except for her. What she grows to realize is that it's her truth and love which ultimately holds the whole house together. She didn't need a special gift—and neither do we—because the most beautiful gift you have to offer this church and this world is you.

So after church we have a thing. We will eat and loosen up. And then we will speak our truths about where each of us are at with faith and church and energy. We want to hear what you've grown to learn about your own journey in this new time.

The past is the past. The future is the future. Today we get to relax into the presence with is among us now. Present to the beautiful ways God's love is growing us up, to bring more love and justice, peace and wholeness to our fragmented world. It's as simple as bringing who we are. No special gifta required.