

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

Heavenly Father, we ask that you would call us, each by name, into the work that you've given us to do. You have given grace to each one of us and called us to be equipped for your service, and service in this world, in order that somehow your people and your church might attain to maturity in your Son Jesus Christ. And so we ask that the ministry and the preaching of your Word might be your Word for the sake and glory of your Son Jesus, in His name we pray. Amen. Please.

We're working our way through the themes of the Spirit-filled life, and today we're talking about this idea of being equipped.

And so I want to share basically three things with you. One is that we are called to be equipped, that we are equipped to edify, edify the body of Christ, that is, and we are edifying the body of Christ in order that it might obtain to maturity, spiritual maturity in Christ. And so I was talking to one of our members, actually walking into the earlier service, which is a very consistent group, by the way, on attendance. They've been running about 18 people, and today they were 22, so they're growing. That's pretty good.

But one of the members was asking, he says, "So do you think that we're going to finally have peace in Israel and Gaza with this peace deal?"

And my answer is, "Well, I hope so."

First of all, I mean, it's been absolutely horrible, the violence that was done on October, I think it was 7th or 6th, a couple of years ago, where the Hamas people came in and just massacred and pillaged, and it was horrible.

That violence. And then the response is, war is very violent, and as we have seen, just incredibly destructive to the people that live in Gaza and the Palestinian group. And so they have gotten to a place, thankfully, where I hope there can be some earthly peace, where the violence can stop, the bloodshed can stop, and perhaps some people's homes can be rebuilt and cities be rebuilt and so on, and some semblance of peace.

But ultimately, there will never be lasting peace in this world until the salvation of the Lord in Jesus Christ is prominent.

There will always be divisions and difficulties and tensions between Jewish people and Muslim people, and fill in the blank with any other tribe or nation or group.

So long as we find our unity in our tribalism and our unity in our differences and in our divisions.

So what Paul is challenging us in his letter to the Ephesians is to see as Christian believers that there is a larger plan of God for this world, that is to bring all things in heaven and on earth under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul says that's where our unity is.

That's where our peace, that he is literally tearing down dividing walls of hostility and making one new man where there have been two. And he's talking about Jews and Gentiles, Jews and all the other nations. He says Jesus Christ is our peace, and He puts to death the hostilities on the cross.

And so that is our calling.

There's no place you can see the need for this than in the gospel passage that we just heard read, where we have these ten people that are lepers.

So Jesus is on His way to make that peace for us on the cross in Jerusalem. His gut that is His intent and His mission. And as He is on His way to Jerusalem, there are ten lepers that are in a region of Samaria, and they cry out to Jesus, "Have mercy on us." The leprosy is not just a horrible disease that is literally wasting away. It's a wasting disease on your skin and your body parts, and it's horrible.

But it's also a social stigma.

One of the things that you had to do if you had leprosy in that day is yell out as anybody was approaching you, "Unclean! Unclean!"

And that gave people notice that you had a disease that they didn't want any part of. And so not only were you physically hurting and wounded and broken, but you were also relationally and spiritually broken because of leprosy. But here's the interesting thing about this. These ten lepers, in their brokenness, actually find a lot of unity.

They are all together in their disease. They have their own little mini-society in their sin, in their disease, and there is no ethnicity in the lepers. A leper colony is very united in its leprosy.

But as they call out to Jesus and He heals them of their leprosy, which is their physical and earthly ailments, another deeper set of divisions arises within the group.

And so Jesus says, "I want you to walk towards Jerusalem and go to the temple and have the priests declare you clean." And as they go, they are healed. All ten of them are healed.

But what is revealed is that nine of them were Jewish, and one of them was a Samaritan.

And so while the physical disease was dealt with in the healing, the relational disease was revealed.

From what was a united group in their lostness and their brokenness and their alienation,

Now, nine can be restored back to society, and one cannot. Not because he's no longer a leper, but because he's a Samaritan.

And so all of a sudden, a new division is revealed in these people, which is fascinating. It's interesting, isn't it?

And this is what Jesus has come to heal, not just our worldly and earthly ailments. And He does want to heal our diseases and help us with our money problems, and help our marriages to become better, and help our wars to

end, and things like that. That is God's plan and aim for us. He doesn't want any of us to be suffering or diseased or challenged in our brokenness.

But that is all symptoms of the larger problem of global alienation from God and from Jesus.

And so when Jesus calls the ten, only one responds to the call of salvation, the Samaritan who recognizes his alienation from society and falls at his feet at Jesus's and says,

"I worship you."

And He gives thanks for what God has done. And it's fascinating. Jesus responds to this one leper. He says, "One healed man." He says, "Your faith," in our text, it says, "has made you well." But it's actually the Greek word that means saved. Your faith has saved you.

And that is the fundamental plan of God. It's not that He would just heal us of our wars and our factions and our...but that He would save us and restore humanity back to relational wholeness in Him.

And so when Paul talks about we are called, we are called to be equipped, but we are equipped with spiritual gifts that the Lord uses to force us and challenge us into relationships spiritually, to where we have to work together with one another for the building up of the body of Christ.

I'm so grateful for my colleagues, but we have, you know, we have our guest organist, and we have the choir over here, and we have Billy and Allison helping out. We have the chalice bearers over here. We have people that have been reading and praying, and even a lot of people behind the scenes, altar guild members. There were people that put together these flowers, ushers that were back there handing out bulletins. And if you think about it, every single one of us actually has been called into this particular expression of the body of Christ and uniquely equipped to play a role within the context of our body.

And yes, there are some who are called to be prophets and pastors and evangelists and teachers, which is part of my role, but those ordained offices are there in what Paul says to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

There's a saying, "You got a fish or cut bait." You ever heard that one? "You got a fish or cut bait?"

Think about what that means. I mean, the reason why we say that is what we're saying is there's,Ä¶ nobody can just sit around in the boat and do nothing, right?

That's what that's saying. You either got a fish or you got a cut bait.

Now I'm in a cut bait role.

That's my job. My job is to be the one that's chopping up the little fish or the little shrimp and putting them on your hook for you and giving you the bait.

Your job is to fish.

You are the saints who have been equipped for the work of ministry, not only ministry within the body of Christ for the building up of the body of Christ, but the ministry of manifesting God's new society in this world.

One of the reasons why there is a breakdown of peace in the Middle East is because there's not a very strong representation of the Christian church in that area.

There isn't a preservative within those people to be the grace and truth to create maturity and life within the people in that region, that they could live together and be

in a society together that is characterized by truth, love, and forgiveness and grace.

That only comes from being built up into the unity of the body of Christ.

And this is why, so importantly, Jesus says to us, "You are the salt and the light of this world."

And so every single one of us has a unique gifting for which we are called to play in the life of the church and in the body of Christ. And it's important for us to think about that. You just think right now, "What is my role?"

How has God uniquely gifted me and equipped me?

What unique things has He given me to contribute to the body of Christ?" And in some ways, it's the gift of healing, like Jesus healed the lepers. It could be you, maybe you have a gift of teaching, or you might have a gift of hospitality, or mercy, or love, or faith, or whatever it is, discernment, wisdom.

All of you, all of us have a role to play.

But then it's not just this new society that the Lord is making, but it's a coming together with the various gifts in order that we might obtain to maturity in Jesus Christ.

Paul says that when we attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, he says, "Then we will no longer be like children, tossed to and fro by the winds and changes of doctrine and teaching, but we will in all things grow up into Christ."

And so he says that we should do this by speaking the truth and love to one another as the body builds itself up in love, each part doing its part equipped for the purpose of maturity in Christ.

I'll give you an example of how this plays out, this role of maturity. So you have the spiritual gifts, but the spiritual gifts are always connected to spiritual maturity. And so you have the gifts of the Spirit, and you have the fruit of the Spirit. And the gifts of the Spirit are things like we just named, teaching, healing, faith, giving, whatever it is.

What are the fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

These two things come together, and that is what leads to growth and maturity in the body. So you can't have spiritual gifts without spiritual fruit of love.

I was talking to a member of the church, and I'm just going to be very generic about this, but I was challenging them. There was a situation, there was a conflict between members of the church. And essentially, the conflict was making this member want to withdraw from the membership in the life of the church. Meghan want to leave.

And the sadness of that is that in withdrawing, incredible gifts would be taken away from the body of Christ with that member's withdrawal.

But the conflict, the remedy of that is in the staying put with one another. And what Paul says, "The speaking, the truth, and love with one another." And so I was challenging, I was saying, "We need to do that. We need to speak the truth and love to one another. So I'll help you. I'll be a mediator. I'll go with you to that person. I'll do whatever we need to to make this happen." And the response was, "No, I cannot do that because if I speak the truth and love in that way, I will basically commit social suicide."

Isn't that interesting phrase?

And what that means is the concern is that the pressures of this community from a worldly societal standpoint, the groups of this society, are more, are stronger than the spiritual society of the church.

Does anybody ever feel that pressure?

I mean, I think if we're honest, that person was speaking something that is very true and very real and very difficult.

I mean, in some ways, let me put it even more pointed. If we're more concerned about our standing at Timacuana than we are at our standing at St. Mark's, that's concerning.

Because this is the place where the society of Christ is to be built up that overcomes the relational leprosy that is manifesting in our world, where this group and that group don't spend time together because they're two different groups.

And so the call of Christ is that the prominence of the spiritual gifts among the membership would be brought to the table, that in a sense that we would all be all in with what God has given us and equipped us with so that this church can be mature in its love and its holiness and its ability to speak truth in this world, and that our influence on society will be more prominent than society's influence on us, that we would be the salt and the light of this world. And so the call is to be equipped, and we are equipped to edify, and we are edified in order that we might reach maturity in Christ.