

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank You for calling us to a calling that is worthy of our giving our lives to Your Son Jesus Christ and inviting us to be equipped by the gifts of Your Holy Spirit that we might grow up into all things into maturity in Your Son Jesus Christ. And so to that end, we ask that the preaching and ministry of Your Word would be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son Jesus, in His name we pray. Amen. Amen. Please.

We're working our way through the themes of what does it mean to be a Spirit-filled person and a Spirit-filled church. And so today's topic is the idea of being equipped, equipped by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Last week we talked about being transformed, and one way to think about the difference between those two things is to be transformed is to have the fruit of the Holy Spirit of God. This is where God is calling us to be a holy temple as people, where our lives would manifest the character of Christ. And so the fruit of the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, we are supposed to, as Christians, each of us are supposed to have all of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. So if you're kind of working through that list and you go, "Well, can I just have love and peace and skip self-control and maybe I don't have to have patience?" No. You're supposed to have all of the fruit. All Christians are supposed to have all of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. But when it comes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and this is where God has uniquely empowered each and every one of us to have particular gifts for specific ministries within the body of Christ, and in this way, we actually are all called to be slightly different.

Those gifts are at our disposal, and there was one person that had all of the gifts, and that was Jesus. He had every single spiritual gift because He was the Spirit-filled man, but He has distributed the gifts to each and every one of us according to His grace and His provision. So that's what we're talking about today, are the spiritual gifts. And what I want to present before you is that we are all called to be equipped.

And there's kind of a pithy little saying that we're not... God doesn't call the equipped, but He equips the called.

He's not picking, "Oh, there's a talented person. Let's get them on Team Jesus," and trying like we do in football teams. You know, we're always looking for talent.

That's not the way the Lord looks at things. He's not a talent scout looking for those who are already equipped and saying, "I'm going to bring that guy on the team or that girl on the team." The way that the Lord does is He calls us to Himself, and then He equips us with what we need to do His ministry. And so He equips those who He's calling, but He equips us in order to edify the body of Christ. And the equipping is for a specific purpose. It's to build up the body of Christ.

And then the goal of the equipping and the edifying is that we might attain maturity in Christ. And so we are edified in order that we might grow and reach that fruitfulness, that maturity of manifesting the character of God in this world that desperately needs to see it in this new society called the church. I had a person ask me whether, just my opinion about whether this new Gaza-Israel peace plan is going to bring lasting peace to the region. And of course, who could answer a question like that? Who knows whether it will or not? But you know, my sense of that is, and this is what I told the person, I said, "Even if it brings a sort of worldly peace, like a cessation of hostilities, that's wonderful. That's a great thing because this has been such a tragedy where you have the initial event that took place with the Hamas on October 7th, and just brutal killings and hostage taking, and worse.

And then the aftermath of that and Israel's response and the war and the destruction and the loss of life, it has been a just horrific human tragedy. And so I hope that this will bring peace to the region. But here's the other thing that I know is that we will actually never have peace between different nations and groups and ethnicities and tribes, so long as we find our identities

in anything other than Jesus Christ.

And so the fundamental answer to the crisis in the Middle East or the crisis between Ukraine and Russia or the warring factions that are taking place even in our own country between, say, Democrats and Republicans or Gators

and FSU people or whatever it is, any division among humanity, so long as we find our identity and our unity in our tribe, in our party, in our fill in the blank in our nation, we will never be ultimately reconciled and united in accordance with the plan that God has for this world. And that's what Paul is really getting at in his letter to the Ephesians, where he lays out in chapter 1 that God is working out an incredible plan of salvation for the people of this world. And he puts it very simply. He says, "The plan of God, which is now revealed, is to bring all things, things both in heaven and things on earth under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ."

That's pretty simple, isn't it?

To unite all things in heaven and on earth under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we call Him the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, as we just sang, because that is our peace.

Paul would go on to describe this, in a sense, this war that's been going on since the days of Paul and Israel versus all the nations of the world.

And he says, "In Christ, God is making the two one.

Those who were enemies with each other, alienated, separated from one another, are being united by the work that Jesus Christ is doing on the cross." He is our peace. That's what Paul says. He's our reconciliation.

He's our unity. So when we get to the passage that we just heard read, he says, "This is who you are as the church, and so you need to live a life that is worthy of that calling."

Yes. You need to live a life that is worthy of that calling. And what does that look like? And he goes through all the things that we say at our baptismal covenant, that there's one faith, one Lord, one hope in God's call to us, one baptism, one Spirit, one faith.

And so our job as we live the life that is worthy of the calling of God is to, and this is Paul's words, "Make every effort to maintain the unity of that Spirit."

And then he throws into the middle of that spiritual gifts, that we are called to this oneness and this unity of Spirit, but at the same time, the Lord has created this diversity among us when it comes to spiritual giftedness that will help us build up the one.

I want to reflect a little bit on our gospel passage for today, where we had the story of the ten lepers.

And this is not just a dynamic of physical health, but there is actually a relational leprosy that reveals itself as this story unfolds. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to die on the cross for our salvation, to reconcile the people of this world to Himself, to God, and to one another.

And as He's on the way, there are ten people that have the leprosy disease in the region of Samaria, and they cry out to Jesus and say, "Lord, have mercy on us." And Jesus pronounces their healing, and He tells them to go to the priest and show themselves to the priest, and so He sends them on a journey to walk towards Jerusalem.

And as... this is what the text says, "As they are walking, they are healed."

Now here's the interesting thing about that.

All of these people had a disease that is very visible. Leprosy is very visible. It creates a situation in which you are unclean. And if you were a leper and somebody else was coming towards you, you had to yell out, "Clean! Unclean!" so that people could stay away from you and get away from you. So not only was it a physical brokenness, but it was also a relational alienation and a relational brokenness.

And part of what Jesus is showing us with these lepers is that all of us have that, so to speak, a deep, deep need for healing, but not just healing of the physical issues and problems and challenges, but also a healing of the relational challenges and the relational alienation.

And so as these 10 start making their way to Jerusalem and they experience the healing from the physical leprosy, and what they're supposed to do is go

and talk to the priests, and the priests would reinstate them back into society. That's what was supposed to happen. They were to be reinstated back into society, so they didn't have to say, "Unclean!" anymore every time they ran into somebody. They could be friends with people, and they could be contributing members to society.

But that didn't work for one of the people.

One of them was not a Jewish person, so nine of them could go and get restored back to society, but one of them would continue to be a social, alienated outcast, the Samaritan.

And so there was no point in him going to the Jewish temple and asking to be restored. So what does he do?

He turns back to Jesus, and he falls at his feet and he worships him and gives him thanks.

And Jesus says, "Well, where are the other nine? Were there not 10 lepers that were cleansed and only one, the Samaritan, is the only one that comes and returns and gives thanks and praise to God and to me?"

And that's the challenge of our day, is they get to go back and be part of their tribe.

But what the Lord sees in this world is that there is no hope in our tribes.

There's no hope in our social standing with whatever group it is, that only in surrendering our hearts and our lives to him will we find salvation, not just of our physical needs, but salvation of our relational needs and our soul.

And so he says to the leper that returns, "Your faith," in the words of our text that has made you well, but it's actually the Greek word for salvation, "Your faith has saved you."

Your faith has, in a sense, healed your whole person, so now you're reconciled back with God again.

Did the other nine not need that as well? Well, of course, they did, but they didn't receive it. And so what the Lord is doing through the church in the midst of a society that is separated by all these things is he is building up a new society made up of various people that bring to the table the spiritual gifts that he distributes among us so that we can all contribute in some way to the building up of his kingdom. And so these are spiritual gifts for a spiritual kingdom. And each one of us is given a unique grace, and this is what the text says, "Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ," the word edification. We are equipped to build.

And so just think about our church, you know, St. Mark's, and all of the different spiritual gifts that are even manifest just today. So you've got me preaching. So there's one. But then you have, like Carolyn, celebrating and leading us in prayers, and Billy's reading the gospel. And then you have the organist playing music and sharing musical gifts in the choir, leading us in musical worship. We had ushers. We have people that have done amazing flowers. You don't know this, but people have been working on the air conditioner.

We have all kinds of things, and you can keep going from there, not to mention the administrative staff of the church and all of that, but people giving of their time and their energy and the unique little piece that each one has been called to do is what is actually building up the body of Christ in this place, in Ortega, in Jacksonville, in our midst.

And so the calling, and this is the question that each and every one of us needs to be asking, is how has the Lord uniquely gifted me?

What is my role, my contribution?

My place where my spiritual gifts have been brought to bear for the building up of the church. And every single one of us, Paul says, to each one of us is given gifts.

You all have spiritual gifts.

And I had a friend in seminary that used... He was a medical doctor before he was going to be a priest, but he started to contemplate all the parts of your body that you could live without.

And so he just started cataloging them off. He goes, "You know, you don't really need your feet, and you don't need your hands, and you could live without your ears and your eyes." And he kept going. I'm like, "You're getting really gross, dude."

You know, I was just picturing in my mind this chopped up, you know, body that is missing a lot of very important parts.

But sometimes that's the way the church is having to operate, where we're missing key gifts and key people who have been put here in this community for particular roles and particular tasks in order for the whole to be edified. And when we don't have those parts functioning or doing their job or contributing in their unique way, the rest of the body is diminished in some way. It becomes handicap and sick and not well.

And so this brings me to the last part, which is that the ultimate goal of the gifts is back to the unity of us growing up into the maturity of Christ.

And to the way that Paul puts it, that we need to attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood or mature personhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

My daughter, who is 20,Ä¶, what is she, 23, 24? Something like that.

She tells me that she does not like adulating.

She wants to stay under the,Ä¶ in the immature and not have to be fully responsible for herself. Then my younger son he wants to grow up too fast. And so I have conflicting things when it comes to maturity in my kids. But this is the goal, that the Lord is wanting us to adult, to grow up in Him so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and through by the waves and carried along by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and

deceitful schemes. But rather, by speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together, every joint with which it is equipped, when every part working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. So we have a goal, and that is for us to be mature as, Ä¶ in mature personhood, adulting in Christ.

And the mechanism by which we do that is actually by speaking the truth in love to one another, is what Paul says. So when we bring our spiritual gifts to the table and somebody else brings their spiritual gifts and so on, there's this sort of checks and balances that happens with one another. And we speak the truth in love to one another with our gifts, and inevitably, because we're sinners and fallen and not fully mature yet, we will have conflicts and difficulties and challenges, and they always happen in the life of a church. And when that happens, it becomes very easy for members to want to absent themselves from the body, because there is nothing more difficult than speaking the truth in love.

It's easy to speak the truth without any love, isn't it? You turkey! Let me tell you what you did wrong and really blast somebody with our truth, or it's easy to be all love and no truth, which is more often than not my fear of some of the disease of the Ortega neighborhood, because we're all related to one another, right? And so we have to be polite, and sometimes in our politeness, we fail to speak the truth, but we all love each other, but sometimes we're not maturing for that reason. And I've had members that have told me that one of the reasons why they don't want to engage in reconciliation, truth-speaking in love kind of processes, when I've challenged them to do that, is because they don't want to commit social suicide.

And that's a very real concern, isn't it? That if you are a little too clear or a little too honest and too truthful, and stay connected in that, that you run the risk of losing your social status in a community in the world.

And so the balance of, say, the Timacuana Club versus the Church of St. Mark's, the Royal Club can carry more weight than the church body, and we'll choose that over this. And we have to be very, very careful about putting more

power in the work of the Spirit among us than the work of that which is working in this world.

And so the call for all of us is to keep our spiritual gifts at the table and to stay engaged with one another as we are learning and growing, and ministering in the name of Jesus Christ in this community. And the vision of the Lord is that as we do that, we will become brighter and brighter and more salty and more salty, and we will be the salt and light that the city of Jacksonville needs and the United States of America needs and the world needs. And that's the hope for the Middle East, by the way, too, in Russia and Ukraine and all the problems of the world. It's not simply that they would be healed from a worldly standpoint, but that they would be saved in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so it's upon us to be the body of Christ and to use our gifts for the building up of His body so that the world can see what mature personhood looks like in Christ and will be drawn unto Him for their salvation.