

You may not know that our Facilities Director, Michael Dembicki, has a degree in genetics. We were talking this week...just a light, easy-going conversation about DNA...and he told me about a fascinating mechanism that occurs within all of our bodies. When our bodies make a new cell, it's given a complete copy of your DNA. However, from time to time, there will be a breakdown, and those cells will become mutated and maybe even cancerous. To correct this, the body sends proteins to cut out any mistake and correct the cell. Our bodies are designed to build itself up, and it is a picture of why God made the Church.

In the beginning, we were given the DNA of the image of God. But that DNA was corrupted through sin. Our spiritual cells became mutated, really cancerous, and all of us were condemned to death. But God sent a Savior, a Great Physician, to redeem us, to heal our spiritual DNA, and give back to us the image that was corrupted through sin. And while God is solely responsible for that redemption, this morning we are going to see that he also uses each one of us to continue to grow that DNA in one another. Each and every one of us are body builders, and God has assembled his Church, in part, to create a community where we each have a responsibility to, and dependency on, one another for spiritual growth. Last week I told you that you belong, you are indispensable, you are necessary. This week we are going to see why.

We are going to be in Ephesians 4, and there is a theme at the beginning that I hope you will recognize. It's of identity and unity. If we are going to talk about what the Church does, we must first begin with who the Church is. Only then can we discuss and understand what we are called to in light of that.

**[Ephesians 4:4-6] <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

There is a sermon series in these three remarkable verses alone, but what I want us to see are seven irreducible minimums of our identity and unity as the Church, and the role played by all three members of the Trinity. As followers of Jesus, we are part of **one body**, a body made up of all believers for all time. When people use the phrase “big-C Church”, that's what they are talking about. This body is assembled through the work of **one Spirit**, the Holy Spirit, begun on the day of Pentecost, and he dwells in the Church. We share **one hope**, it is a living hope. We are all looking forward with certainty to the same thing: eternity with God. Our hope is founded on **one Lord**, Jesus Christ, the only way to God. We share **one faith**. Through it, we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and we share **one baptism**, which is an outward expression of that faith that identifies us with Christ in his burial and resurrection. And we are all children of **one God and Father**, our Heavenly Father, who is supreme over all of us, works through all of us, and is in all of us. It is out of that identity and unity that we are called to do what Jesus has built the Church to do.

**[Ephesians 4:7-11] <sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” <sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also**

**ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.”**

By the grace of God, each and every one of us who are followers of Jesus has been given a gift. You have not only been *saved by grace* to be reconciled to God and be with him forever, you’ve also been *enabled by grace*, in the form of a spiritual gift, to use for the benefit of his body.

Paul quotes Psalm 68 to help us understand what these gifts are and how these gifts are given. Here Jesus is shown as a conquering military leader who has returned to his people in triumph. A military leader would often return from a victorious battle with both captive enemies and the spoils of war. These spoils would then be given to the leader’s followers. But the gifts Jesus gives is not a bunch of stuff. It’s people. Jesus was victorious through the cross, after which he descended into a tomb for three days, and was raised three days later, declaring victory over the enemies of sin and death. He then ascended to his throne with the purpose of filling all things with himself. The spoils of war are those who were captive to sin and death but who have been liberated and redeemed and are now captive to Jesus. That’s you and me.

That means that, not only has Jesus given you a measure of himself as a gift, he has then gifted you to his Church. **You are Christ’s gifted gift to his Body.** God gives gifts to men and women and then gives gifted men and women to the church.

**Apostles:** One who is sent out on a mission. The office of apostle is reserved for those who witnessed the resurrected Jesus, but we do believe there is still apostolic gifting within the church. These are pioneers who start new works and advance the Gospel abroad. I think of Mike Congrove, who founded Empower One, and has taken the Gospel to the people in South Sudan/refugees in Ghana.

**Prophets:** One who hears God and proclaims his Word. They bring God’s Word to bear on specific circumstances for the purpose of correction, challenge, and comfort. Like Apostles, the office of Prophet is closed. The original prophets revealed God’s will to the church before biblical canon was complete. But there is prophetic gifting in the church. I’m so grateful for Mary Breunig who always has something from God’s Word to bring to whatever situation you’re wrestling with...and like most prophets, she ain’t afraid to share it!

**Evangelists:** One who bears the good news of the Gospel. They are recruiters. They can be compared to spiritual obstetricians, whereas pastor-teachers are spiritual pediatricians. Rob Langworthy, who has been a part of our church for a few years, leads our Prison Ministry, taking the good news of the Gospel and the freedom found only in Christ those who are in bondage.

**Shepherd (Pastor):** Oversees and cares for the flock of God. They nurture and protect, they are highly relational, and thrive in helping others grow in their relationship with Jesus. I think of Becky and Scott Palmer, who have faithfully shepherded our kids in Children’s Ministry for years.

**Teachers:** Know and share truth with others, recognizing the truth of God is a transformational force that sets people free. They use creative ways to express that truth and their heart is stirred

when someone comes to a place of understanding. Michael Degroat teaching “How to Read the Bible” Training Experience. Loves to teach, loves to help people understand.

So then what is the purpose of Jesus giving gifted individuals to his body?

**[Ephesians 4:12-14] <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.**

God gives gifted believers to the church to activate other believers by equipping them for ministry so that the body of Christ is built up. **You are given a part of Jesus to help others become full of Jesus.**

The word “equip” comes from the Greek *katartismos*, and in this context is meant to communicate “prepare” or “perfect”. But in other NT passages, the use and context of that word actually gives us a much richer understanding of its meaning. In Matthew, it is used in reference to mending nets. Something has broken and, therefore, stopped functioning. It is put back together, so it works again. The word is also used in Galatians as “restore for proper use”. Taken together, it shows us that the work of gifted believers is for both preparation and restoration of others in the Church. We are called to establish each other in ministry, but also to restore each other when we drift, particularly when the destabilizing storms of false doctrine and false people arrive.

You are body builders. You are not just building up your body, you are building up the body of Christ. It’s like we are spiritual trainers who are together at a spiritual gym and we are helping each other build spiritual muscles. Just as an athlete’s body is built up under the guidance and encouragement of a trainer, the spiritual muscles of the body of Christ are built up under the guidance and encouragement of spiritual trainers. Each of us is both a trainer and one being trained. We never graduate from growing.

The ultimate aim of our ministry is that each of us would be full of Jesus. “Attain” is used to mean “travelers reaching their destination”. The destination of the body of Christ, as it grows up, is evidenced by three characteristics: 1) That we remain united, growing in the understanding of and dependence on the Word of God. A divided church is a broken church. Growth will not happen until the disunity is healed. 2) That we would mature in our faith. Now we might hear that and think that means we know our Bible better and are praying more. That’s true, but a maturing faith is marked by an ever-faster recognition and recovery rate: Recognition that our lives have drifted away from God, and recovery to realigning ourselves with him. 3) That we look more and more like Jesus. That the character our lives looks more like the character of his life. Or, like I said at the beginning, that our DNA would look more and more like the DNA of the image of God.

I remember several years ago working with a brand new believer who was somewhat rudderless, yet eager, in his newfound faith. We would spend our time talking about his commitment and investment in a church, studying God’s Word and talking about how it should impact his life. We would talk about how he was living his life (he was very candid!) and consider what God would

think about the decisions he was making. And we would wrestle with other things he was being taught, not all of them biblical and true. And you know what I saw? Transformation and joy. Was he perfect? No. Was he growing? Absolutely. We are all works in progress, and that progress occurs when God works through each member of his body.

We are all in ministry. If you have said yes to Jesus, you have said yes to ministering to his body. There is not a clergy class and a laity. You are not called to ministry or called to something else. There is one aspect of my story that I loathe, because transitioning from the marketplace into vocational ministry reinforces the idea that some of us are called and some of us are not. That to really do ministry, you have to work for a church. Folks, it's a fallacy that creates division in the church and leaves some thinking they have nothing to contribute. Your calling to follow Christ includes the calling to serving others in his name, regardless of what you get paid to do.

It's also one of the main reasons we gather. Everything I read these days tells me church attendance in America is plummeting, and while it has a lot to do with the frenetic pace of our lives, I also think it's because we've just forgotten why. Listen, if Sundays are merely a mini Christian concert and a 35-minute motivational speech, then let's stay at home in our pj's, put a Hillsong playlist on Spotify, and watch Tim Keller online. He's really good! But what if our gathering has to do with glorifying God and edifying each other? If we gather to raise our collective voices as one in worship of our Savior, to consume his Word as spiritual food and engage each other with how it can impact our lives, and to serve each other by building up one another to the fullness of Christ, that's something to get out of bed for. This passage makes clear that our growth in Christ is dependent on one another. God has designed his church where we need each other to become more like him. The gathering of the body is to the praise of God and the building up of his people...and to be equipped to take it where we live, work, and play, which we'll look at over the next few Sundays.

We know *that* we are gifted. We know *why* we are gifted. The last part of this passage is the spirit in which we exercise that gifting. *How* do we use it?

**[Ephesians 4:15-16] <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**

When each part, united in Jesus, the head of the body, is working properly, the Church grows. When we employ the gift of Jesus, and do so with the heart of Jesus, the body matures in its relationship with Jesus.

This passage includes a well-known phrase that believers have wrestled with for centuries. We are to "speak the truth in love", literally "truthing in love", meaning both speech and action. There is, perhaps, no greater balancing act for a believer than to keep these two in tension, because it calls us to a two-fold devotion: Relentless devotion to the Word of God (truth) and a relentless devotion to the people of God (love).

Truth without love is a sledgehammer. Love without truth is a cotton ball. Neither are effective in helping others progress in maturity. That's because truth without love isn't truthful, and love without truth isn't loving.

If we veer too far on the truth side, we make a relationship with Jesus an exercise in compliance. We communicate that someone's acceptance by God is contingent on their behavior. That keeps people in bondage. The Bible is the Sword of the Spirit, not only sharp enough to slay spiritual enemies and arguments, but also sharp enough to wound a brother or sister if it's not wielded with loving care. Maturity occurs when we live with the freedom that our salvation is an irrevocable gift, that we are fully accepted by God because of Jesus' work on the Cross, and our identity is in him, not in our performance.

If we veer too far to the love side, we make a relationship with Jesus an exercise in self-indulgence and enablement. We communicate that someone's choices and actions are insignificant to God. That keeps people from a transformed life. **[Proverbs 27:6a] <sup>6</sup> Faithful are the wounds of a friend.** I admit that's a tough idea to embrace, on both sides. Will I trust God enough and love my brother or sister enough to be the bearer of truth? And will I trust God enough to trust his people enough to really listen to the body he has assembled for my good? Maturity occurs when we understand our salvation frees us from the bondage of sin and empowers us to live a life aligned with God's will. We make choices not to earn God's favor, but because of God's favor that's already been given. Maturity is a desire to please God.

If we exercise our gifts with the balance of truth and love, and we humbly receive the ministry of our brothers and sisters in Christ as Jesus' agents of spiritual growth, we will grow.

What does it look like when we're all working properly? I couldn't shake the idea that we work a lot like a Slinky. I know it's an obscure illustration but hang with me. I've always been fascinated with and love to watch slinkies. **[SLIDE: Slinky video]** A Slinky has 98 coils but is one piece of metal. But for it to work, each coil must impact the other coils. They must be side by side, working in unity. Under the governing influence of gravity, one coil moves, and as it moves, it transfers its energy to another coil, and pulls it forward, to the next and to the next, and it progresses towards destination. When doesn't it work properly? If there's a kink in a coil, if it's bent out of shape, or if there is overlap, creating friction between coils that stops the process.

The Church is made up of many members, but it is one united body in Christ, and we are progressing towards the fullness of Christ with and through one another. If we get bent out of shape because of wrong beliefs or living apart from God, we're not going to work right. If we have friction with another member and are divided, we're not going to work right. We have to be restored, mended. But if each member is aligned and unified, as one of us progresses under the governing influence of Spirit we, in turn, give our energy to another member, who in turn gives their energy to another member, and so on, at which point the whole body is growing, making progress to our destination, which is the fullness of Christ. You are body builders.

End with an expression of that unity: COMMUNION

**[1 Corinthians 10:16-17] <sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?**

**<sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.**