

## Becoming Mature in Christ Ephesians 4:7-16 John 15:1-7

We continue with our series on the Epistle to the Ephesians and today we have reached the middle of Chapter 4, becoming Mature in Christ. Now I find it interesting that I should be given this subject to preach on. The sermon series has had a couple of changes to the order to accommodate particular Sunday's where the original plan would not fit. Was this engineered so I would get this subject and make sure I preached to myself on maturity, even if I am unable to convey any of the gems on this subject from the passage to you? One could suspect that certain unfortunate boating adventures may have been in the mind of the sermon series planner. However, I am afraid I have to disappoint you because in this respect, that is Maturity, I have a unique situation. When I was born the registrar decided that, like Peter Pan, I would never grow up and under the description of my gender put the word ..... BOY! Therefore I can only speak to you as an observer.

So let's begin our examination of the passage by getting out of the way verse 8, the quote from Psalm 68:18 and verses 9 and 10. This is the bit about Jesus ascending to on high and descending into the lower parts of the earth. Psalm 68 is a long Psalm praising Gods triumph over Israel's enemies and the giving of gifts, here Paul uses it as a description of Jesus' exaltation. Verses 9 and 10 are a reflection of the belief that Jesus descended into the place of the dead, the lower parts of the earth. As he foretold in Matthew 12:38: "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, 'Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.' But he answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.'" Now the important thing to focus on here is what the effect of Jesus' ascension is; the giving of gifts.

Verse 7: each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Each of us, no him over there, or the person at the front, or the one waving their arms about, or attending every service, was given grace; each of us you and even me.

John 14: "Jesus said, 'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.'"

Acts 1:6 "When they had come together, they asked Jesus, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight."

So then each of us is given grace, and power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; each of us.

Paul expanded on the gift of the Holy Spirit in a number of his letters, particularly Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Luke mentions them in Acts 13 and 21, and the writer of the letter to the Hebrews 2.

Here in verse 11 Paul list of gifts is defined as "some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers", in 1 Corinthians 12 he expanded the list with miracles, gifts of healing, helping, guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.

What is the giving of these gifts to each and every one of us for? Paul is very clear verse 12; "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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," all of us.

Paul uses the phrase, "the Body of Christ" as a metaphor for the church, for a church and he expanded on this at some length 1 Corinthians 12. In today's Gospel reading Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine to convey the same idea. Each part of the body has a function to play to the benefit of the whole body, and the branches of the vine cannot survive on their own unless they are connected to each other.

Verse 5 Jesus said; "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

In 1 Corinthians 12:12 Paul writes; "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And so the body is not made up of one part but of many." Paul continues in verse 25; "there should be no division in the body, but its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

It could not be clearer could it? You, you all, are the body of Christ, and each one of you, each one of us, is a part of it. Now we know that we have all be given gifts through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and we are all part of one body, that is the Church, this church, and those gifts are to equip the saints, that is you and me, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, our church, 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. Who are our prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, workers of miracles, healing, helping and guidance, and those with the gift of tongues? It could be you, do not hide your gifts, they are given to build up the body of Christ in this place.

Now comes the tough bit! Where does this Maturity in Christ lead us to? In the New Revised Standard version of the two passages this morning the Epistle ended with the word Love and the Gospel with Love One Another. Many years ago when struggling with the task of loving one another I was advised by a senior, well respected, member of the congregation that I did not have to Like everyone, just Love them. I have never been able to reconcile that statement with my reading of scripture. In today's Gospel reading Jesus said, "You are my friends .... I have called you friends." Jesus calls us to be his friend and he says this in the context of loving one another. I must say that I like my friends, and indeed I love them.

Paul said; "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." Fair enough, he call us to be mature and no longer be like children, but what does he go on to say? Verse 15; "speaking the truth in love", really, speak the truth in love. And why, for what purpose do we speak the truth in love? Paul goes on to say we must, he does not say we could or say it would be nice to. No, Paul says; "we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted 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 passage from Ephesians can be summed up by the end of the passage from this morning's Gospel reading from John 15:12 and please remember that in this passage and in most of scripture where you find the word You is should be read in the plural, or if the translation were done by a Texan he would use the words You All; "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Last year we had a week of Vision and Prayer for our church. I would like end by having us say that prayer together, which will be on the overhead projector.

"Loving Heavenly Father, without you we are blind, deaf and without understanding. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and open our minds to discern where you are already at work; Open our ears to hear your voice; open our eyes to see desire for our church; and open our hearts to love with your love. Put your strong arm around us and guide us where you want us to go. We pray this in the name of your dear son, Jesus our Lord. Amen"