

Ephesians 4:1-16 AM

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[0 : 00] Let's pray as you stand. Father, help me to speak the truth of your word in love, so that we may all grow up in every way into him who is our head, into Christ.

We pray this in his name and for his glory. Amen. You can be seated. When I was a teenager, I was really, really involved at my church.

And I remember one time our rector, the church's senior minister, came to speak to my youth group. My rector actually looked a lot like David Short, but way younger.

And the rector said to my youth group, In human history, there has never been a time where it is harder to follow Jesus than it is in high school, in Vancouver, right now.

Very provocative. I think since then it's gotten even harder. Our passage today is about growing in Christ.

[1 : 17] It's about growing through spiritual adolescence. It's about how to mature from being a child in faith to being mature, to being grown up, established in what you believe.

So if you're a brand new Christian and you're looking to grow in Christ, this message is for you. If you're a young person, and you're transitioning from childhood to adulthood, this passage is for how you can grow up spiritually.

If you're not a Christian, if you're a guest this morning, this passage is for you too. Because today you're going to be invited to know the God of the universe, to receive his gift of grace, given to you freely by his son, and to start growing in him today.

Lastly, in case I missed you, if you're a mature Christian, this passage has something to say for you as well. Because it tells you how you should be spending your time, and your strength, and your gifts.

How you can keep growing until you reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So this passage is for all of us.

[2 : 31] No excuse if you fall asleep. Ephesians 4 is about growing in Christ. So let's get into it. It would be really helpful to have the passage in front of you.

So if you want to grab one of the blue or black big books, the Bible in front of you, it's on page 977. There aren't enough for every single person, which I love, because it means you need to get to know the person next to you.

So if you need to share a Bible, that's even better. As you flip there, there's a really provocative image in our passage. I don't know if you caught it when we just heard it. In verse 20.

So Ephesians 4 verse 20. This is across the page on 978. And the picture is of a child in a sailboat being thrown around at sea by crashing waves and unyielding winds.

It's a very scary image. Two summers ago, I attempted to take my very young children, ages 4 and 7, on a kayaking trip to the Twin Island Provincial Park up Indian Arm in North Vancouver.

[3 : 34] And if you've been there, you know what I'm talking about. You know it's worth the journey. It's breathtaking. But, when we got to the dock in Deep Cove, the wind was howling, and the waves were crashing.

I did what any responsible parent would do. I was determined our adventurous trip not be cancelled by some unfortunate weather. So courageously, I led our intrepid explorers out into the squalling sea.

My children were tossed to and fro by the waves, and their kayak capsized, after about 50 feet within the first two minutes of the trip. And then, as I tried to pull them into my boat, my kayak capsized.

And that was the end of our epic expedition. And my children refused to go kayaking with me anymore. Fair enough. This is the picture Paul gives to explain the danger of not maturing in Christ.

If you are a young Christian, a young person, a new Christian, you're like a child in your faith. You could say you're like a spiritual infant, a baby Christian.

[4 : 46] And this means that you are vulnerable to being thrown around by the waves of life, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, and by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

So the image is a warning. There's false teachers out there. There's sometimes even false teachers in the church. And if you do not grow up in Christ, you risk being swept away by their cunning, conniving, deceitful scheming, and teaching.

The faith of a five-year-old will not sustain a 25-year-old. The faith of a 25-year-old will not sustain a 45-year-old, or an 85-year-old, or a 105-year-old.

We need to keep maturing in Christ to weather the storms of life and not be swept away by seductive secular ideologies and idolatries.

So how do we mature in faith? That's what Ephesians 4 is about. Our church has matured. It's 100 years old this year. It's incredible. Many of us have seen God do amazing things through St. John's together.

[6 : 02] Many of us have come to faith here. Many of us first heard the gospel here. Many of us made lifelong friends here, spouses here, were married here, had children here, buried our loved ones here.

We've been through storms together. We've grown together. We've cried together. My family came here when I was four. And at that time, St. John's had a brand new, young, exotic rector with a thick mustache and an even thicker accent.

And now, 32 years later, all of us speak Australian. It's been an incredible hundred years of God's faithfulness to us. We've matured as a church.

We've grown as a community of contrast, gripped by the gospel of grace, sharing Christ with our city. But we're now entering a season of transition.

Our rector, David, is retiring. And there are other staffing changes as well. We're also praying about a long-term permanent home for our future mission and ministry in our city. There are winds of change in the air.

[7 : 15] And the waves may start to rock our boat as we sail into uncertainty and transition. Maybe you're already feeling a little seasick. So how do we weather these potential storms together?

How do we grow in Christ? This is what Ephesians 4 is about. We're parachuting into the middle of the letter of Ephesians. We missed chapters 1 to 3.

Throughout all of those first three chapters, Paul writes about what God the Father has done for all of us through his Son, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul writes that God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

We hear that God has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be in him. The gospel is summarized in Ephesians 1, verse 2 this way.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. God has given us a gift of grace and peace through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[8 : 22] This is what verses 8 and 9 of our text are about. It's about how God has sent his Son into the world. Jesus descended from heaven to earth. And then Jesus died in our place to take the punishment for our sin and establish peace between us and God.

We read that Jesus descended down into death for us to forgive our sin and cancel our debt, to make peace with us and God by his blood.

And then after dying three days later, he ascended from death back to life. He rose from the dead. And then he ascended further back up to heaven where he now rules over all.

And so this descent down to earth and down further into death, and then the ascent back to heaven has achieved grace to you and peace from God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel is a gift of grace that God offers to all of us right now. That's what God has done for us already in Christ.

[9 : 27] And so anything we do to grow in Christ is a response to what God has already done for us through Christ. Our text, Ephesians 4, begins with the word, therefore.

This word connects our passage to everything that's been written up to this point in Ephesians. So it's like Paul is saying, in light of everything God has done for you in Jesus, in light of knowing the unknowable love of Christ that surpasses human knowledge, therefore, verse 1, I urge you, as a

prisoner for the Lord, to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. In response to the grace of God and the gift of peace with God, walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which he has called you. So how do we do that?

There are three commands in our text. Three ways to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. Three ways all of us can grow in Christ. First, we are to maintain our unity together.

Second, we are to do the work of ministry together, serving each other to build up the body of Christ. And then lastly, we are to mature together, speaking the truth in love, as Christ himself builds us up in love.

[10:52] So we grow in Christ by being united together, doing ministry together, and maturing together. First, we grow in Christ by maintaining our unity.

Look at the beginning of our passage on 977, verses 1 to 6. I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

What word is repeated more than any other in those verses? One. It's at least seven times. There's complete unity, perfect unity, comprehensive, all-encompassing unity, oneness.

We're told to bear with one another in love, eager to maintain unity, oneness of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And then in case we missed it, we're told there's one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

[12:24] A few weeks ago, the leaders of our church met for a mini-retreat to prayerfully plan for our church's transition. And we were all asked to vote on what we felt was the most important thing for us to aspire to in the next 18 months.

What is the single thing we should be praying most fervently that God would do for St. John's? And the top answer amongst our leaders was we should be praying for unity in the gospel.

Big changes in churches can cause conflict. Transitions can be opportunities for division and quarreling and complaining.

Times of transition, both in our own individual lives but also in our life together, can be moments of either great vulnerability or moments of great opportunity for us to grow.

Transitions can see you soar to new heights new job, new marriage, new baby, new city, whatever. But transition can also be a time where your priorities change.

[13:33] The people, the faith of people often soars or crashes around life transitions. So if you think of graduation or starting a new romantic relationship or getting a new job or having a child or moving or retiring or getting an undesired diagnosis or losing a loved one, big transitions in our lives are big moments for our faith.

So friends, in our transition as a church together, let's be one in Christ. This is how we grow together in faith. Verse 2 urges us to strive to be humble and gentle and patient toward each other. bear with one another and be eager to maintain the unity of the gospel in the bond of peace. How do we do this?

I want you to notice the basis of our unity in Ephesians 4. It's a unity of the Holy Spirit in verse 3. So we stay united with one another as we stay united with God's Holy Spirit who dwells in everyone who believes that Jesus is Lord.

So God's Spirit is the one who empowers and propels our unity towards one another. Notice, we're commanded to maintain our unity.

[14:56] We're not commanded to create unity. God has already made us one through his Son and his Spirit. Our unity is a gift of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so maintain this gospel-centered unity. unity. Notice also the basis of our unity is God's unity. We're told there's one Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

There's one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. And there's one Father. These three persons of the Godhead who together are so perfectly united they are one God.

So the union of God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the foundation of our unity to one another. because the same Spirit that unites the Father and the Son unites us both to God and to

each other.

Our unity is derived from his unity. In him, we are one. Though a Christian who is united to Christ through being united to his body will mature in Christ.

[16:02] Said the negative way, if you cut yourself off from the church, you will cease to grow in Christ. Like a limb that is amputated from its body. So the first way to grow in Christ in Ephesians 4 is to maintain the unity that God has given us through the Gospel.

Through Jesus and through his Spirit, we are united to one another and united to God. All right, let's pick up the pace. Second way to grow in Christ is in verses 11 and 12.

We're told in verse 11 that he, Jesus, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ. In verse 11, we're told Jesus gives us human leaders, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, who all share and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Did you notice all five of those listed human roles are teaching roles? their speaking roles, their sharing roles. Without these five groups of leaders, none of us would know the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

[17:15] All of these five, in different ways, share the Gospel with us. They tell us that grace and peace is offered to the world through God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

But did you catch in verse 12 why Jesus gives us these various human leaders and teachers? Is it so that we can just as individuals believe in the Gospel and float up to heaven when we die?

Look again at verse 11. Jesus gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, why? Verse 12, to equip the saints for the work of ministry that the body of Christ may be built up.

This is the second way we grow in Christ. Christ. We hear the Gospel and we are equipped and then unleashed to do the work of ministry that the body of Christ may be built up.

So we first grow in Christ by maintaining our unity and now secondly we grow in Christ by growing in service, growing in ministry that the body of Christ may be built up. So the mission of the church is to receive the teaching of the apostles and prophets, to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed in God's Word and shared through evangelists and pastors and teachers and then through hearing that to be equipped to do the work of ministry together.

[18:41] We are all called to be saints. In Christ we are all set apart by God and our collective shared mission is to do the work of ministry.

ministry. Now wait a minute you may say ministry is the minister's job. We hire people to do that. Not according to Paul.

According to Paul the work of ministry falls not on my shoulders but rather ministry by which we mean service is work for all the saints. My job is to equip you to do ministry.

ministry. And this makes sense. Imagine if we as a church had all of our ministry falling upon the shoulders of one person or even a couple people.

Well next to nothing would ever get done. The church collectively together is called to be the body of Christ. The incarnate embodied living visible reality of God's presence on earth.

[19:47] We are all to serve the world as Jesus did. Paul writes here that the pastor's job is to equip the saints to teach God's word and to shepherd God's people to live in communion with Christ empowered by his Holy Spirit.

So my job is not to be the minister. My job according to Ephesians 4 is to be a teacher a shepherd and an equipper. The word equip you may know is the word *artidzo* in the original Greek which is the name of the training institute St. John started 25 years ago to equip young people to serve the church through developing skills in teaching and in church ministry.

And according to this verse *artidzo* is for all of us. All of us should be equipped for the work of ministry. All of us have been gifted by Christ uniquely to serve his church in diverse ways so that the whole body of Christ is built up.

So teaching, shepherding, and equipping my job. But ministry, serving one another, is your job. And doing ministry, serving others in Christ's name, is the second way we grow in Christ.

John Stott, Anglican pastor, writes, The way the whole body grows is for all its members to use their God-given gifts to serve. These gifts are so beneficial both to those who exercise their ministry faithfully and to those who receive it that the church becomes steadily more healthy and mature.

[21 : 29] The church does not work like McDonald's. Church is not about coming for an hour to quickly fill your soul with some fast spiritual food that will nourish you for another week.

We do not come here to consume. We come to worship God and to be equipped to serve one another. We come to be taught and equipped and empowered and unleashed to do the work of ministry.

If you're a follower of Jesus, you are called to do the work of ministry, the work of serving the church to see it built up. And that's the second way you grow in Christ.

Okay, let's recap. We grow in Christ by growing first in unity with God and with one another. We grow in Christ then, secondly, by being taught and equipped to do the work of ministry together for the building up of the body of Christ.

And the result of our unity with God in each other and our collective ministry is now our shared maturity. This is my third and brief final point. We have been called to a shared unity and a shared ministry and now in verse 13 we read, until we all attain to the unity of the faith of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature adulthood to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ.

[22 : 55] So the result of our unity together and our service together is maturity in Christ. Look at verse 15. 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 in every joint by which it is equipped when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Did you notice how the body grows in verses 15 and 16? We're told, first of all, that as mature Christians we are to speak the truth in love. We're to grow up into the head into Jesus Christ and it is Jesus who makes the body grow.

It is Jesus who builds his church. It is Jesus who matures his people. And if you now look back over the whole passage you see the hand of God behind all of this empowering all the ways all of us are maturing in Christ.

our shared unity is based upon God's gifts of his son uniting us in his gospel and his Holy Spirit at work within us now.

Our shared ministry is based upon the message we've received from the messengers Jesus has sent us. Without Jesus raising up and sending apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers none of us would know his gospel.

[24 : 21] So our shared ministry is based upon his initial ministry. And now lastly our maturity is based upon him making us grow. God is behind our growth every step of the way.

God gifts us with unity in the gospel with a shared ministry through the gospel and with a shared maturity that he himself is forming in us. Our God reigns over all.

and in all and through all. And the way we see God reigning today is by building his church. The existence of this community this gathering a hundred years after our first gathering is a miracle. Our history has been messy. But God has been faithful. He reigns over his church. He establishes it.

And upholds it. He works through it and over it and in it. The church alive today is the physical proof of God's reign and God's power.

[25 : 34] And so all of you whoever you are whatever you believe this morning are now invited to grow into it. Grow into Christ by growing into the church.

Be united with the people around you in faith. use your gifts and your strength to serve his body. And Jesus himself will build us up together.

He will mature us until we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ himself.

Thanks be to God. Amen. Amen.