

Grow Op: Grow Up

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[0 : 01] Let's bow our heads and pray as we stand. Heavenly Father, we are empty and broken, and as we turn to your word now, we pray that you would fix us and fill us, teach us how to love one another, to serve one another, and to love you above all things.

For the glory of Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen. Please sit down. Well, if you would take your Bible and open to Ephesians chapter 4, on page 182, as you're doing that, I just want to point out that there's an Australian who was leading the British Open as of last night.

And I think there's an Australian who's leading in the Tour de France and has been for five days, if I'm not greatly mistaken. I think the Australians beat the South Africans at rugby a couple of days ago.

Have I got everything? Well, I feel a lot better. Okay, Ephesians chapter 4. I first read Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe when I was in grade 11.

My sister, who was sick of me bugging her, gave me a set of the four books. And on the beach, I read this story, I'd heard this story, and I had the experience you sometimes have when reading a book.

[1 : 31] When you finish reading and you don't know where you are, you've been so taken with the story that you can't figure out whether you're in the story and what is reality.

Do you remember in that particular book, you've probably seen the movie, particularly if you've got children, how Lucy goes playing hide and seek and climbs into a wardrobe which is actually not just a wardrobe, it is a door to another world.

Now, the church is like the wardrobe. For those of us who enter into the church, it's like a door to another world, but for others it's just an ugly old structure, nothing extraordinary.

And as we've been moving through this book of Ephesians, we have seen that all of God's purposes for the cosmos come to bear on the cosmos through the church.

It's almost unbelievable. All that God has done and is doing through Jesus Christ is achieved in the world through the church.

[2 : 41] And it's easy to look at the church through human eyes and through cynical eyes and to think, goodness gracious, it's just another human institution, it's people who gather together and sing, sometimes poorly, although the last song you sang was just terrific.

We mumble prayers, and it's not a particularly effective human institution, is it? I mean, goodness gracious, look at Jim and I and what we wear.

And we speak from a book that was finished, written 2,000 years ago. In Canadian culture, the church is almost completely marginalised and irrelevant.

It's like the Canadian Pacific Railway. It's there, has a nice history, but it's hardly relevant to us. And we've got to realise that, according to the Apostle Paul, the church, well, it's just not a human institution at all.

It's made up of men and women, but it is the only group, it's the only body that is built by God, and it's the only group that's going to outlast this world.

[3 : 49] Mustn't confuse it with the buildings or with denominations. It is the body of Christ in the world. It is the most essential, we are the most essential group in the world, according to God. Just look back for a second at chapter 3, verse 10, on the left-hand column of that page.

That, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

Some people say to me, our audience as a church ought to be Shaughnessy. Others say it ought to be the media, lawmakers, the shakers and the movers.

What is a shaker, by the way? Tell me later, don't tell me now. As we gather together, the New Testament says to us, the real audience are the spiritual powers, and God holds up the church and he says to the powers, you want to see my wisdom?

There it is. It's in the church, it's in my body. Which just goes to show how different God's wisdom is from human wisdom. You see that, of course, in the crucifixion.

[5 : 02] If the church was a human institution, if we were created by some brilliant spiritual brains trust, we would not want to appear weak and ordinary like we do, would we?

We'd not want to be dependent. We certainly wouldn't want to teach things that are so culturally awkward. We wouldn't want to ask so much of each other. We'd have a message which was powerful and relevant and dominant and just a little more congenial.

To a lot of people, I think the church just looks like a wardrobe from the outside and that's the way God has decided to organise it.

The wisdom of God is foolishness to man. It is the very fragility and weakness and dependency of the church that shows the wisdom of God. And as we come to the second half of this letter, in chapters 4, 5 and 6, the apostle begins with the body.

He begins with the church of Jesus Christ and he gets very practical and he says, what does it mean for us to belong? And last week we began, do you remember, in the first six verses of chapter 4 to look at church membership 101.

[6 : 12] In today's passage, in verse 7 to 16, the apostle Paul gives us four pictures of the church. Here are four things that God thinks of you and me and four things that we need to take into our heart and out into our life.

Let me go through them. The first is that we are liberated slaves. Look down verse 7. Let me read a couple of verses. But grace, verse 7, but grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore it is said, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and gave gifts to men. Keep listening.

In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.

Is that clear? Clear? It's very confusing, isn't it? Okay. There's a quote there in verse 8.

[7 : 21] Quotes are usually from the Old Testament and they usually give us the clue. The quote is from Psalm 68. On the day when God ripped his people out of Egypt.

They were captives in Egypt. We've been through this. And brought them to Mount Sinai. With a great shout of triumph, God went up on the mountain. The mountain shook and God took his people with him who used to be captives.

Do you remember? And now they are liberated to be his precious possession. And what Paul is saying by quoting that text is that all of that was a rehearsal for what happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The descending and ascending is Jesus. Jesus descended from heaven as a baby on the first Christmas. He went down to the lower parts of the earth in his death. God raised him from the dead, ascended, raised him to his right hand and now he sits in rule.

What does that mean for you? If you are a Christian, you are the most free, the most unbound, the most liberated of any human being.

[8 : 31] You may not feel like it, but there is no power, there is no principle, there is no person who can enslave you. We are free from death, free from guilty conscience, free from sin and you and I have a new start with one Lord, the Lord of Liberty.

We're free. And why has God done that? At the end of verse 10 it is so that he might fill all things with Jesus Christ. We're not free to go off and live a selfish and indulgent life.

We're free so that through us God is going to fill the cosmos with the presence of Jesus, the glory of Jesus and the rule of Jesus. That's what freedom is. That's the first picture of the church.

We're freed slaves. There is a second picture and it is that we are sheep. When God brought his people to Mount Sinai he said to the people I'm going to take a particular group, a small group and I am going to take them to myself, the Levites and then I'm going to give them back back to you so that they will serve you as priests.

Verse 11 speaking about Jesus his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

[9 : 59] Now we're very used to speaking about spiritual gifts as Christians aren't we? When the New Testament speaks about spiritual gifts it usually speaks about abilities, the ability and discernment and prophecy and encouragement and those sorts of things but here they are not capacities, they are people and he gives to the church certain people and do you notice there's one thing in common, there are four gifts listed, do you notice what the one thing that they all have?

They are all ministers of the word, they're all those who proclaim the gospel, apostles and prophets, first two are those through whom God has revealed the word, number three the evangelists are those who preach the gospel to the ends of the earth including the west coast of Vancouver and then the fourth group there's two words but they're bound together in the original pastor teachers now different churches have different ways of referring to their clergy some churches call their clergy elders some call them ministers some call them pastors some call them priests some call them things that are unmentionable I was giving an affidavit a week ago to a lawyer and she had never heard of what a minister does and well the word rector hadn't worked at all well with her so I said don't I said just write incumbent and she looked at me in such a way that she was so sorry for me the word pastor is a good word the word pastor comes from being comes from the shepherd the Lord is my shepherd

I shall not want Jesus Christ is the good shepherd and now that God has freed us from captivity God gives to his church people who are pastor shepherds pastor teachers who teach the sheep or lead the lead the sheep into the pasture see how do you feed sheep you take them into the pasture what is the pastor supposed to do but to take the sheep God's people to feed on the word of God that's the heart of the job of the pastor but here's the really key thing the purpose of the teaching of God's word is not to make you fed stuffed full sheep it is to equip you see that word in verse 12 it is to equip you for work for ministry this is a beautiful word this word equip it comes from two things one is it's fixing something that's broken you break your leg the doctor equips it in the gospels when the men are when they're on the beach and the nets are all broken this word is used for mending the nets that's the first thing it also means to fill when something's empty when something needs to be supplied with something we come to church broken and empty and God gives pastor teachers to the church who take people to

God's word for fixing and fulfilling that's how it happens that's what's supposed to happen but I want to say there's a problem with the sheep metaphor isn't there the sheep metaphor is not complete because sheep don't do a great deal do they they eat they walk they lie down and they taste delicious they do the first two pictures of the church are really what God does God frees us Christ frees us and Christ gives these gifts of pastor teachers now the second two pictures are about what we do question verse 12 why has God freed us why has God given us pastor teachers who are we verse 12 we are workers verse 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up the body of Christ or verse 16 last phrase each part each part is working properly makes bodily growth and up builds itself in love you see look back at verse 7 how many

Christians have spiritual gifts from verse 7 to each is given every single believer every single one of us belong to Jesus Christ you've been given spiritual gifts look down at verse 12 who owns the work of ministry who is it to do the work of ministry it's all the saints not the clergy the saints and now we have some stained glass windows here they are not the saints the saints are the living Christians according to the New Testament every single follower of Jesus Christ has a spiritual gift and you are the ones to whom the ministry belongs it is not the possession of the clergy I've said this many times from this pulpit I love preaching from this pulpit because you see on the right here these are the previous rectors of St.

[15 : 34] John's and there's one empty box and it looms over me there's a few more over there my point is this clergy come and go but the ministry that God has for St.

John's is yours it belongs to you it belongs to all the saints because church is not a spectator sport it's not a concert it's not a lecture we're not a supermarket in Jesus mind we're meant to be a living growing body which functions and works together and if it's healthy it's growing and the growth depends almost entirely on the members and whether we are working in ministry and serving one another very helpful isn't it it's work because it cuts against the grain to serve other people particularly people you may not like and it's usually invisible it's certainly never glamorous and it takes planning and it takes thought and it takes perseverance and you will never be spiritually mature you'll never be growing as a Christian if you stay on your own and are not connected into the body look down at verse 14 so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the cunning of men by their craftiness in deceitful wiles and some of you have become

Christians in your middle age it's highly embarrassing isn't it it's highly embarrassing because you feel like a baby you meet with other people who know so much and there's so much to learn well one of the most wonderful and frustrating things about the Christian life is that you never stop growing sometimes I've said to God I'm learning enough I don't want to learn any more lessons but he has different ideas and we keep growing until the day Christ takes us to be with himself and it's not just a growth in knowledge it's a growth in working and in serving so you see there's two ways to remain immature as a Christian one is to avoid growing in knowledge avoid learning the scriptures avoid the opportunities to do that and the other is to avoid ministry not being involved with others allowing others to serve you and the sign of being immature is that you're unstable and gullible and you're swept along with new teaching because you haven't sunk your roots deep into

Christ and you haven't sunk your roots deep into Christ's people that's why some of you remain spiritually immature you think that learning God's word is for others and that the ministry is for others you cannot grow to spiritual maturity with a 20 minute sermon once a week you just can't do it you have to be reading and studying your word not just on your own but in groups with other people taking as Jesus says big drafts of the word pressed down pushed together running over and you cannot grow to spiritual maturity unless you are working to serve other Christians in the body I know some of us here at St.

John's feel very hesitant to be involved in ministry and serving others we look around we see other people doing it we think they are so brilliant they're so capable and I feel desperately unworthy and I feel empty and I feel broken and God gives ministers of the word who should be teaching the word to mend us and to fill us so that we might be equipped for ministry so it's next to impossible to keep working in ministry unless you're regularly being equipped from God's word and there are lots of implications of this aren't there and you may want to take some of these implications and talk about them over coffee let me just mention one one is that Bible teaching cannot be an end in itself goal of Bible teaching is not to fill our heads with knowledge and theology and doctrine even though I hope your heads are full of those things it's meant to so fill us and mend us to fix us and fill us so that we would love one another and work and serve one another if after hearing the teaching of the word of

[20 : 21] God you don't move into action and work in ministry the teaching of God's word has failed if you have been hearing and teaching the equipping of God's word it's time for you to begin working it's time to begin serving find a way to build up the body of Christ so here is the third picture of what it means to belong we are workers all of us and the fourth picture very briefly we are Christ's body this is run all through it but let me look at the last two verses 15 and 16 don't be immature rather verse 15 speaking the truth in love and by the way that doesn't mean be honest with each other but do it nicely speaking the truth of the gospel this is not for the pastors this is for all of us we are to be speaking the truth of the gospel to each other in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into

Christ from whom the whole body joins and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied that's you and me when each part is working properly that's you and me makes bodily growth and up builds itself in love it's a great lovely picture Jesus body on this earth is full of ligaments and joints and different parts which is each of us as individuals and the way the body grows both extensively and intensively as each of us work and serve and the way this works the way the life works in the body is that last little phrase in love in love all the doctrine and knowledge and theology in the world are absolutely useless unless we love one another in fact they're worse than useless they make us sound harsh and all the serving and ministry if it's not done in love is also useless you cannot grow as a

Christian in isolation you have to be part of the body and this is not something we can organise or programme come on staff organise programmes so that I can exercise my gifts it has to come out of the freedom of Christ it has to come out of our hearts it's only the freedom that I have in Jesus Christ that's going to make me want to love you and do what is spiritually best for you it's only the freedom of Christ which gives me the self-forgetfulness I need to begin serving and take my part eagerly someone came up to me after the early service and said how do I find my spiritual gift and the answer of course is not to worry about that not to focus on myself but to get involved in serving and helping and loving and when you do that God will show you what your gift is if the purpose of the gifts is the building up of the body of Christ do what you can to build up the body of Christ and you'll find your gift but do it in love it's only love that moves us from being self-serving to being other person serving it's only love that moves us from being spectators to being loving members it's only love that changes us from being consumers to contributors it's a wonderful vision isn't it

God's church it's deeply encouraging and it's deeply challenging you want to have more Jesus more of Christ in your life you want to have more fullness of him in you and in the world what are we to do we are to work together for the growth of the body we are to leave behind immaturity and lack of love and we are to find the spiritual task that he's given us to do by serving each other can only come about by a change of heart how does the wardrobe go from being a wardrobe to becoming a door to a different world how does the church go from just being another institution to become the fullness of Christ it's as God frees us from captivity and places us in his body and gives us shepherds who feed us and equip us so that we might serve one another in love what a great vision with every member working properly so that the body should grow so that he will fill all things with the presence and the power and the purity of the

Lord Jesus Christ Amen let's kneel and pray heavenly father we come before you this morning in humility and thanksgiving knowing that we are unworthy to be called members of your body but so grateful for your wonderful mercy and grace in making us so thank you for revealing to us in our passage this morning what it means to be the body of Christ to be released from the captivity of sin and death to be given the freedom to live in righteousness in love and in service to others instruct us personally in this freedom and in the giftings you've given each of us open our minds and hearts to know and to obey the specific calling on each of our lives to serve your body strengthen us in generosity and self sacrifice heighten our sensitivity to the needs of those around us and form us into a mature people who truly measure up to the full stature of

[26 : 25] Christ help us to fulfill all that you have created and called us to be Lord in your mercy thank you Lord for the specific calling you have placed on st.

John's thank you for the faithful shepherds you have provided for us allow your word to continue to feed us and to equip us for all the work and ministry that you have for us please strengthen the members of this church in unity in our knowledge and worship of you and in our service to others we pray specifically for those missionaries whom St.

John supports including Catherine Gwinnett of the North American Indian Mission in Campbell River Sharon Thompson of the Wycliffe Bible Translators in Burkina Faso West Africa Brian McConaughy of the Ratnak Foundation in Cambodia and Doug and Anna Marie Graham in China Lord fill these your servants with your spirit and with strength endurance faithfulness righteousness wisdom and joy let them be powerful witnesses of your presence and your love for those whom they serve Lord in your mercy hear our prayer Father we see and hear accounts of the evil in our world of war enslavement torture genocide oppression and in the midst of it all government officials who are more interested in their own selfish gain than in using their power to effect change and to protect the innocent we are overwhelmed by feelings of fear grief and anger but our righteous desire for justice brings with it the terrible realization that true justice would bring about condemnation for us as well had we not been pursued by you and freely given your gift of grace and forgiveness and so we plead for your mercy and truth and healing for these oppressors and wrongdoers have mercy also

Lord on those wronged and somehow as only you can bring redemption to their situations only you can bring about true restoration and reconciliation in our world only you can establish peace so we ask Lord for you to act in the ultimacy of your power your love your mercy and your justice Lord in your mercy father father we are desperately needy race we are plagued with hindrances to life as you created us to live it but in your love you entered our helpless state our weakness our suffering and you have provided hope and a way to wholeness we therefore call on you Lord to bring relief healing provision comfort and knowledge of your love to those whom we know are in need of these things we pray specifically for Ron Rowena

Gordon Rob Fiona Harold Johanna Peter Janet and Caroline for Mayron we we ask for a favorable hearing from the immigration board and in silence Lord we lift up to you those we know personally who are in need of your help Lord in your mercy we thank you Jesus for providing a way for us to bring these requests to the father we thank you father for hearing our prayers and for inviting us to pray boldly we thank you spirit for being present here with us and for interceding on our behalf in thankfulness and in humility we pray your will be done Lord God on earth as it is in heaven amen.

[30 : 32] you