

Sermon for August 5, 2018
“The Body of Christ: Braggin’ on the Church”

Ephesians 4:1-16

I’ve heard a lot of people braggin’ on the church. Here at Aldersgate we have a lot to brag about! This is a church with a vision. When I came here you had just gone through a process of evaluating your vision. You took on the task of asking yourselves where you were and what God was calling you to do. The result was a 15-page document! That’s a lot of Vision. That vision is that at Aldersgate we are “Hearts on fire ... seeking, sharing, serving ... for God.” And you have tried to live out that vision.

Aldersgate is also a church that has been through hardships and remained faithful. Of course, there was the fire back in the 90’s that destroyed the sanctuary. Aldersgate has experienced ups and downs throughout the years and has continued to be God’s outpost in this neighborhood. We have expanded our outreach, and our understanding and practice of Christian Hospitality. Our Child Development Center is a tremendous help to young families in the community.

Aldersgate also has a vibrant Christian Education Program. We have wonderful Sunday School classes for adults and children. We have various Bible Studies and Women of Faith and Men of Integrity, Messy Church, Visioneers, Youth, 56ers, Prime Timers, Sojourners, and the list goes on! Our music program has continued to expand and improve. We have a wonderful staff and very capable members who give of their time and talents for everything from Habitat for Humanity to Vacation Bible School to English as a second language classes. On top of all that we have wonderful facilities, a beautiful sanctuary and gym and The Commons area is something every church should have!

I could go on and on bragging on Aldersgate!

Well, the reason I am braggin’ on the church is I think that is kind of what Paul is doing in his letter to the Ephesians. Today’s sermon is the fourth in a series going through the book of Ephesians. Ephesians tells us about the church as the Body of Christ. We have learned that the as the Body of Christ we are blessed “with every spiritual blessing the Heavenly places.” We have learned that Christ has broken down the barriers between us and united us in the Body of Christ. Last week we learned that we have been given the power of God’s love to guide, strengthen and inspire us. This week our lesson seems to brag on the church.

Sometimes Paul as a pastor had to step on a few toes, but sometimes he had to pat a church on the back. The tone of this passage is that of Paul patting the Ephesians on the back and encouraging them. Yet he does more than just say “keep up the good work.” He tells them how they can do it. And he tells them exactly what it is that they are doing that is so good.

He writes, “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (1-3) Paul here is telling them to continue to maintain their unity. Continue to forbear one another in love. You know it is not easy to love everyone. Sometimes it is even difficult to love everyone in the church. But that is what we are called to do.

To encourage them in this, Paul explains the spiritual basis of our unity. We all share in the one body of Christ and each have received the same Holy Spirit. We have all been baptized into the same hope and we all serve the same Heavenly Father. There will be times when, on a human level, we have our differences with one another. But if we remember the Spirit and Faith that we share, that memory can lift us above those human differences. And despite our differences we can embrace one another in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Then Paul went on to say, “But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.” (7) He later adds, “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” (11) Paul is here following up on the theme of being one in the Body in Christ. In his other writings Paul expands on this image. We are the Body of Christ and each of us different part of it. So, we don't all have the same gifts and abilities and callings. If the whole body were an eye where would the hearing be. And the foot can't say to the hand I don't need you. If everyone in the church were a preacher who would be in the congregation?

But what is the purpose of this division of labor? Is it just to keep us all busy? No, the purpose is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,” (12) We each have been graced so that each of us can play a role in building up the church.

But to what end? “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to become mature, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;” (13) The purpose of all this is that we grow to know Jesus. God enables us, through the Spirit, to work together so that we can help one another know the grace and love of God in Christ.

So, through the grace of God we have been brought together in one body to know Jesus. Then what? Paul writes, “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.” (14) I've heard it said that people who believe in nothing will fall for anything. That's the way people seem today. They run after every fad of spirituality. Even within the church people get caught up in arguments over doctrinal questions that are inconsequential.

But this strength against “every wind of doctrine” is not just for our benefit. We are made strong so that we can speak “the truth in love.” (15) In this world people need to hear the truth. There are so many competing philosophies and priorities in our society. Someone needs to stand up and say what is most important.

We need to speak the truth and Jesus is the truth. God has graced us so that we can make Jesus known to others. As John Wesley said, so we can spread “scriptural holiness.”

God has given us grace through the Spirit to unite us so that we can “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” But you already knew that didn't you? Aldersgate already knows that we have been given God's grace to bring us together. We already know of the call to humility and meekness in our one faith. We also know that we are to strengthen one another as our Mission Statement says: “We are called to make disciples by embracing all people with God's love in Christ and equipping each other for service to God and His world.”

Those are the things that we're talking about when we brag on the church. But according to Paul all of it comes from God as a gift of grace. The family feel of the church and its unity of mission are all from the grace of God. It is God who gives us the gifts of teaching and music and praying that help us to be disciples of Jesus. And it is by grace that we are made strong in the faith so that we can reach out to help those in need.

So, let's brag of the church, the Body of Christ! We have been called together in one spiritual family with God as our Father and Christ as our brother where we are all sisters and brothers. We have been equipped with differing abilities and perspectives and gifts so that we can work together to make a real difference in the world. By the grace of God, we have been given the love to speak the truth of God in love to the world. Let us humble ourselves and glorify God for the Body of Christ.

Come, celebrate the Body of Christ, as we re-member our unity in Holy Communion!