

Jesus Instituted the Public Ministry

I. To equip the saints

II. To build up the body

Our new church will be beautiful. God's people have responded to the love he has for them. They have given gifts to make that building beautiful because God has given the members of this congregation an understanding of being good stewards of their money and shrewd managers. And at the same time not being cheap toward God's house, people have realized that God's house deserves the best. This building project has also revealed that the Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts to his Church, evidenced by saints sacrificing their time and abilities.

In Romans 12 and 1Corinthians 12 apostle Paul provides us with a list of spiritual gifts: **preaching, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing money, leadership, showing mercy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, interpreting the Bible** and others. Paul's point in those two different sections is that Jesus, as Head of the Church, blesses the members of his body, the Church, with special gifts they can put to work in their congregations. We see those gifts being used in this place.

In Ephesians 4:10-16 Paul describes more of these gifts that Christ gives to his church. Although Paul isn't talking about spiritual gifts he gives to specific people. He's talking about spiritual people that he gives as gifts to the Church. We're talking about pastors, teachers, staff ministers, vicars, administrators, professors and others that Jesus gives to congregations and our synod to carry out ministry.

You might be a little bit confused. Last week the Holy Spirit taught us that as members of Christ's Church all of us have been called to be priests. We all have the right and responsibility to use our gifts to preach the gospel, to baptize, to pray, to learn and teach the Bible to others. So why do we need pastors, vicars, professors and teachers?

Jesus instituted only one ministry or office in his Church: the ministry of the gospel. There are different ways to carry out the gospel ministry. One way is privately, when you as an individual share the good news of Jesus with your children, grandchildren, or a neighbor, or invite a friend to worship. Another way to carry out the gospel ministry is publicly. The Bible says there is a need for such public ministry. Paul writes, **"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"** (Romans 10:14-15) Jesus wants the good news of his life and death and resurrection to be told to everyone publicly!

As you read your Bible you will find that Christ doesn't give duties or responsibilities to the public ministry that all believers don't already have. The only difference between the public ministry and the ministry of all believers, then, is that it is public. What the pastor does on Sunday morning is very public. When that same pastor has a devotion with a homebound member, that is public, too, because that act is carried out on behalf of, in the name of and in the place of other believers. "Public" isn't even a good term; maybe "representative ministry" would be better. The pastor's ministry represents the people of the congregation. Many Bible passages describe public ministry as a responsibility done for other believers. The public ministry is to be entrusted **"to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."** (2 Timothy 2:2) They are told to **"be shepherds of the church of God."** (Acts 20:28) Paul asks, **"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe."** (2 Corinthians 3:5) Paul was sent

out by other Christians (Acts 13:1-3) and he was accountable to the ones who sent him out in their name (Acts 14:26-28; 18:22). Public ministers serve and represent a congregation by working alongside of them to publicly carry out the one ministry of the Gospel.

In our lesson, Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul is pointing out the public aspect of the gospel ministry that Jesus instituted. **[Jesus] gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.** (vs11-12). This morning we want to focus on the pastors and teachers. In the original language of the New Testament this passage combines the office of pastors and teachers in one person; the pastor/teacher. The pastor shepherds the souls of his flock by teaching them. For our purposes this morning from now on we will refer to it as the office of the pastor.

There is a specific reason why Jesus gave his Church the gift of pastors. Paul says, **“To prepare God’s people...”** literally *to equip his saints (his holy ones)*. (vs12) The pastor’s responsibility is to train and teach you, the lay people. There is a very specific reason why Jesus wants pastors to train and teach lay people, **“...for works of service.”** (vs12) Jesus wants you, his saints, equipped so that you can serve others. There is yet another reason why Jesus wants pastors to train and teach lay people, **“...so that the body of Christ may be built up.”** (vs12) Jesus wants you, as his saints, to serve each other so that the members of his Church grow stronger. Paul describes what pastors use when they teach and preach, **“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.”** (vs13) Having a common knowledge and belief in Jesus as our Savior from sin is the key ingredient that brings about the spiritual growth that Jesus is talking about.

What does that look like in our congregation? It involves the balance of nurture and outreach we talked about a few Sundays ago. The pastor prepares and learns a sermon and preaches on Sunday morning. He prepares Bible studies and leads Bible studies for the congregation, for men and women. He teaches our young ones in catechism class. He teaches classes to those who want to learn more about the Bible in *Foundations of our Faith*. He leads devotions with those who are homebound, sick, imprisoned, hospitalized and deployed. He administers the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. He recruits saints to go with him on outreach visits. He trains elders and Sunday school teachers – all so that you may be equipped for works of service, and when you are equipped, you will serve each other, and when you serve each other with the Word of God, the body of Christ will grow stronger.

But Paul continues about how long we are to equip the saints, **“until... we become mature.”** (vs13) I’ve met quite a few Christians in my life and I dare say that many if not most consider themselves to be mature Christians. There are precious few who have a mature faith, I consider myself to be in the severely immature category, especially when I hear the Apostle Paul tell the Philippians that he hasn’t attained all this yet, admitting that his faith was immature. Read Romans 7 and listen to him express his frustration over his frequent lapses and lack of maturity. If Paul considered that he himself had a long way to go in growing spiritually, then what is true of us?

Finally, this equipping will go on, Paul says, until **“we attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”** Pastors can stop preaching and teaching just as soon as our knowledge of the Bible is the same as Jesus’ knowledge. That’s what it means to attain to the whole measure of fullness of Christ. For pastors, equipping the saints will never be a completed project. For the laity, being trained, learning their Lord, growing into a maturity of faith is a lifelong process that comes with the Holy Spirit’s help and is completed in heaven.

What happens when a pastor loses his focus? Then he regards his own personal Bible study as unimportant. Then what happens to the richness of his sermons and the depth of his Bible studies? It’s not there. He becomes resentful toward the sheep he is shepherding, when they show a lack of zeal or enthusiasm for spiritual growth. He loses sight of his

responsibility and primary task to equip the saints. What happens to a congregation that loses sight of growing? They become resentful of the pastor, who constantly pleads with them to take advantage of opportunities for spiritual growth. They grow apathetic toward spiritual growth. They forget about their shepherd's primary job and burden him with other responsibilities so that he can't carry out his duties of preaching and teaching. They become very judgmental of each other and legalistic. They carry out their work, but with the frustration of Martha who whined, "Lord, tell my sister to help me!" They lose love for one another. Then the pastor and his congregation become like those described by Paul in vs 14. They are little babies, on the floor of a rowboat that is caught in the middle of a stormy sea, tossed about, rolling around in the ship, with nothing to hang on to. A spiritually weak congregation and pastor will go nowhere. They will not grow. They will drown. They will die.

How do we keep our congregation and our pastor from drowning? How do we keep our pastor and our congregation from losing sight of the necessity to grow spiritually? How do we keep that zeal and fire for Bible study? We don't. We can't. Not by ourselves. But Christ can and he does. Christ does when we are engaged in faithful worship and Bible study where other saints are gathered, there we can point each other to the little 12-year old boy from Nazareth who was busy about his Father's business in the temple. When we as pastor and lay members are engaged in diligent personal study of the Word, then we can point each other to the Savior who made it his habit of attending the synagogue every Sabbath. When husbands and wives and parents sit down with each other and their children they can point each other to their Savior who was obedient to his Father's will; who always demonstrated faithfulness to the study of God's Word, whose perfect life of love covers over our imperfect lives. When we encourage one another to participate in the Sacraments, there our Father shows the great love he has for us. Love that sent his Son to shed his blood, blood that covers over our lack of love, blood that covers over our apathy and resentful attitudes, over our judgmental attitudes, blood that covers over our sins. His blood makes us holy, makes us his saints, his priests, his pastors and teachers and lay people – ministers of the gospel.

Show me a congregation where the pastor has a rich devotional life, and spends the majority of his time equipping the saints for works of service... show me a congregation where the saints are faithfully taking advantage of spiritual growth opportunities, and there you will find saints who love their Savior and show it by loving each other, saints who serve one another. There you will find a body that is strong and growing. There you will find a pastor and a congregation working hand-in-hand for the Lord and his people. May God continue to grant that to us here at this place. Amen.