

BEING CHURCH **Ephesians 4:11-16**

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature... We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love,” (Ephesians 4:11-16, NLT).

This is a great day for all of you, for the G3 faith community, for Mt. Tabor UMC and for the Kingdom of God. It is a fulfillment of a dream that was born about six years ago. It was a dream to reach people who have never gone to church, people who have dropped out of church and people that weren’t for whatever reason likely to attend a traditional church. It was a dream to connect to people wherever they were in life and lead them into a life transforming relationship with Christ. It was a dream to do something different for the Kingdom of God and to truly make a difference at the same time.

Pastor Ron heard a calling for this work. He became very passionate about leading this effort. Mt. Tabor caught the vision. Mt. Tabor began to see what could be and how this could be a really good thing. Mt. Tabor began to think outside the box and supported the effort.

Pastor Ron and a group of people from Mt. Tabor began to give themselves to building a faith community. It would evolve into far more than an alternate worship service. It would evolve into a fully grown community of faith with small groups, children’s ministry, youth ministry, outreach and leadership teams. In about three years the faith community grew to the point that it could become financially independent. Today it has now reached the place where it is ready to become a chartered United Methodist Church and begin another chapter in its short history of realizing its potential as a church helping to build and bring the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Most everyone is familiar with Robert Fulgham's little book, "*All I Really Needed to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten.*" And perhaps you have also heard the alternate rendering that was written based on the same idea: "*All I Really Needed to Know, I Learned from Noah's Ark.*"

1. *Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.*
2. *Stay fit. When you're six hundred years old, someone might ask you to do something really big.*
3. *Don't listen to critics—do what has to be done.*
4. *Build on high ground.*
5. *For safety's sake, travel in pairs.*
6. *If you can't fight or flee—float!*
7. *Don't forget that we're all in the same boat.*
8. *Don't miss the boat.*

I am particularly drawn to the last two: "Don't forget that we're all in the same boat." And "Don't miss the boat." That's a good description of the mission of the church. Someone once said that the definition of "fellowship" is a group of fellows together on a ship. We are on a boat together and you don't want to miss this boat. In the charter of the Church of The Savior in Washington, D.C. it says, "On the ship of the church there are no passengers; all are members of the crew."

In the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus he writes, "*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ,*" (Ephesians 4:11-13). These verses show us what we are about. Paul uses this chapter to tell us what the church is here for.

Earlier in the same chapter Paul had spoken about our calling. "*As a prisoner for the Lord, then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received,*" (Eph. 4:1). Paul is in prison in Rome as he writes this letter near the end of his life. These are important thoughts he shares with the whole church and especially to those who are Gentiles (non-Jews). Live up to the life that is worthy of your calling. Remember, you are called. God has called you and gifted you. There is a purpose for your life. Never forget that. So live into your calling and be faithful.

That is a great picture of the church: The family of God working together to build itself up, living together, sharing together, growing together, becoming more mature together, and attaining the full measure of Christ together.

Paul wrote, "*From him (Christ) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work,*" (Eph. 4:16). That is God's plan for us. That is what becoming the Family of God is about.

Eric Sevareid was one of America's most able and popular news commentators. On his retirement, he was reminiscing about his many years as a news correspondent and commentator in the nation's capitol. He spoke of another commentator who, he said, knew everyone worth knowing: the president, the diplomats, the senators, the president's cabinet, key bureaucrats, the elite of Washington. He had the contacts; he was full of information. There was only one problem said Sevareid, he never used it. "He forgot what he was here for."

That could be a parable for us. Paul wanted to make sure that we never forgot what it is all about.

Paul writes in his letter to the church in Corinth, "*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it,*" (I Corinthians 12:27, NRSV). The church is not a club one joins in hopes of privilege or perks. Being a member of a church is something that is part of God's plan once we choose to believe in God and make Jesus our Lord and Savior. Once you do that, you automatically become a part of God's family. And that is what the church is. We are God's family.

And being a part of God's family, being a member of God's family comes with things we are supposed to do. We are each given certain gifts, the Bible calls them spiritual gifts, that are supposed to be used for building up the Kingdom of God, for building up the church, for serving others. And each of us is supposed to do some other things like pray and worship and give and grow. And all of these things are captured in the covenant that you make when you commit to being a part of this faith community, or now, church!

Being a member of G3, being a member of God's family, the body of Christ means we are all necessary parts of the whole. Some may function as an eye, some as an ear, some as feet and some as hands. But each one is a valuable part of the whole and necessary for the whole.

Being a member of the church means that though we are all different, we still work together. There is a common mission that joins us together and we all need each other. When one suffers we all suffer. When one rejoices we all rejoice. There is a unity in our diversity and we are better together!

Being a member of the church means that everything we say and do is based on a biblical foundation of love. Though it shouldn't be this way, sometimes that is our hardest task: to love everyone regardless. We love the unlovable and those who are hard to love. We love even when persons sometimes act out. We love unconditionally. We speak the truth in love. We find a way to love each other and see Christ in each other. We love because God is love.

Being a member of the church means that we are all a fully functioning part of that church. There are no bench warmers in the church. There are no spectators sitting in the stands. We are all on the playing field. We give generously of our resources and we

serve without hesitation. We follow the way of Christ and his example in sacrificial love. We follow Paul's command, "...offer yourselves as a living and holy sacrifice, pleasing to God," (Romans 12:1).

I heard about a worship service one Sunday morning where the tenor soloist didn't quite have it together. It sounded like he didn't get out of bed on the right side. But a visitor noticed something strange. People in the church pulled out their hymnals and started thumbing through the books looking for the song he was singing. By the second verse the congregation had joined the soloist in the hymn. By the third verse the tenor was beginning to find the range. By the fourth verse he was singing beautifully. Then on the fifth verse the congregation became absolutely silent and the tenor sang the most beautiful solo of his life.

That is the Family of God at its best. The Family of God is the body of Christ working together, enabling one another to sing the tune Christ has given them. It is the body of Christ working together to make a difference in the world. It is each one using its gifts and sharing their gifts to build up the church. It is the Body of Christ coming together to share its monetary gifts. It is each one doing its part and realizing that any suffering or inconvenience now is not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed later.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.