

## Bearing Good Fruit in Service

January 20, 2008

(3rd in the series on ***Growing Deeper in Your Faith***)

The last two weeks we have been talking about the importance of growing in our faith. Growth starts with examining the person God has intended us to be through the Word found in the Holy Scriptures. Second, our faith grows as we seek God through worship and prayer. Something special happens to us when we seek God's presence with God's people. We make ourselves available to the community of believers where the power of God's presence is multiplied. In these special moments God can speak to us as well as use us in the lives of others.

Today we examine God's call on our lives. God calls all believers to bear fruit and to live out God's purpose for our lives. As followers of Christ, we learn the importance of living for others. This is a faith decision not so much based on our abilities but on where God through Christ needs us. Using the metaphor of a tree – the scriptures lead us to our God-intended purpose and through worship and prayer we draw on the life giving waters of God's spirit. Like the tree, we are called not just to grow taller and deeper, but to bear fruit for God's Kingdom.

Oliver Wendell Holmes speaks to this poetically when he said, "... unfortunately most people go to their graves with music still inside them." The challenge today is to listen to God's call through Christ, breathe in the power of the Holy Spirit and breathe out Christ's purpose in service.

### **Ephesians 4:1-6**

As followers of Jesus Christ we are heirs to the same promises given to Abraham. In Christ we have been promised a new identity; a future and security. Our **new identity** is found in Jesus Christ who claims us. We are the adopted sons and daughters of God. Our **future** is sheltered under the presence and guidance of God. No longer should we worry about the things of this world, for our existence is not dependent on the things of this world, but rather the things of God. Our **security** is based on a new order. No longer shall the strong and powerful prevail. Love will be the new way of God's people as all creation moves toward completion in Christ.

### **Ephesians 4:11-16**

Each of us is gifted; there is a variety of gifts and the purpose of these gifts is two fold; to **equip** the saints for the work of ministry and **edify** the church. Paul, in the midst of his glorious vision of the church would not let us forget what it is all about: "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (v. 12). The KJV put a comma after saints; the RSV does the same, using "equipment" rather than "perfecting" of the saints. The meaning is clearer to eliminate the comma as the NEB does. The NEB translation reads most clearly: **"to equip God's people for work in God's service."**

Christ's **body** is built up as its members attain **unity** in Christ, founded on a common faith in him. Through this service, the church, then, **attains spiritual maturity, to the measure and stature of Christ**. The goal of this service is negatively stated in verse 14. Our service is to prevent the disintegration of the church which occurs when its members are childishly attracted to false **doctrine**. Instead the church should manifest the **love** of Christ throughout all it does. This loving service is our calling as followers of Christ.

Paul implies there is no life without growth, and reaffirms that growth comes from Christ, **who calls us into service through the spirit.**

*Please note: The following daily readings allows you to study other passages that speak to the place of scripture in our lives. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.*

**Monday** – Read Romans 12. Like Ephesians 4, Paul is outlining service through the presence of Christ and the gifts for service. Paul is more direct in this passage, giving us clear direction for our behavior as followers of Christ. He begins this passage with a clear call "... to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God". Use this passage as a guide for your day. Read it at the beginning of the day to prepare yourself and at the end of the day to see how well you have lived for Christ.

**Tuesday** – Read I Corinthians 12. Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and I Corinthians 12 are the three places Paul mentions and explains spiritual gifts. Notice as you read this passage that Paul is reminding the church at Corinth (a rich, educated and talented church) that our work for Christ is always to bring unity to the church. The gifts are given to bring unity – anything that does not bring unity to the body is not of the spirit. Today examine your relationship with the church. Are you bringing unity or contention? Are you adding to what God is trying to do or only taking?

**Wednesday** – Read I Corinthians 13. This familiar passage is often read at weddings. It is about the character and definition of love. It is easy to separate this passage from the rest of Paul's letter as an aside about our behavior with one another. Closer examination reveals that I Corinthians 13 is the conclusion to chapter 12. Paul says clearly here that no matter what our gifts, actions, sacrifice or service, if it is not given in love – it means nothing. How are you using your service and spirit-led gifts in the spirit of love?

**Thursday** – Read Philippians 1: 3-11. Focus on verse 6 – Jesus never gives up on us. Paul reminds us that no matter what our circumstances, "...the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion..." Pray for God's will and strength that you might hear and respond to God's call in your life.

**Friday** – Read Hymn 87, *What Gift Can We Bring?* Sing or read this hymn as a prayer for the day. Give thanks for the privilege of serving God and the growth that it brings to our faith and life.

Have a great week!

See you next Sunday, January 27, for **Growing Deeper in Your Faith: It's Not About Me**. This is a worship experience you will not want to miss.