

EPHESIANS 4:1-7; 11-12

A number of years ago, during the course of a reception, a man expressed to me how he felt about the Church. You know how it is, if you happen to be a nurse or a doctor, they'll tell you about their aches and pains. If you are a meteorologist, they will complain about the kind of weather we've had lately, maybe even blame you for it. If you are a banker, they'll talk about their last visit at the local branch. If you are a politician, they will give you all kinds of advice how to run the government.

When people see me coming, or, when they find out what my profession is, among other things, they'll talk about the Church. Actually, I don't mind it at all. It gives me a chance to talk about one of my favorite topics -THE CHURCH AND ITS REASON FOR BEING, which is what I'm going to talk about this morning.is

Back to that evening, my friend was trying to tell me how disappointed he was at the Church. When I asked him about the nature of his disappointment, his answer was – “I feel most church members are pre-occupied with themselves and their buildings.” He went on to say how he was brought up in the Methodist Church, but his preference today would be the Salvation Army. “They take their mission seriously” he said, and are busy meeting human needs”.

I didn't argue with him, as a matter of fact, I agreed with him. Whether my friend was sincere in what he was saying, or, he may have been making excuses for all I knew, that was his problem. As a minister of Jesus Christ, I need to be concerned about what he said. I need to keep asking, is the Church in general and the congregation I serve in particular about its business.

Let's be honest with ourselves - sometimes we do get carried away and are pre-occupied with all sort things that have nothing to do with the mission of the Church, in fact, they stand in the way. That's why we, and by "we" I mean all of us, need to keep asking ourselves – what is the Church's business and why do we exist?

With a question like that, a preacher is never stuck for a text. The New Testament, anywhere from the Sermon on the Mount, to the parables of our Lord, to the various letters preserved in the good book, are full of illustrations, when it comes to the role of an individual Christian and the purpose of the Church.

Let's hear what St. Paul has to say about it in Ephesians chapter 4....

What we have in this section, is a picture of the organization and administration of the Church in its formative years. In this chapter, Paul sketches out what the Church must **be** and **do** if it is to fulfil its mandate. I like this chapter because it tells us what we are to do when we come

together, and when the rubber hits the road. When we worship, and wherever we go when the benediction is pronounced.

In addition to being **humble, gentle, patient, tolerant and united**, “**Each one of us**” Paul reminds us, “**has received a special gift...**” It doesn’t say some of us, it says ALL of us, has at least one special gift. The question is, have we identified that gift, and are we using it to the glory of God and for the benefit of those around us? That’s the question.

Today’s reading mentions some of the gifts people have in a typical congregation. Referring to those of us standing behind pulpits and those of us sitting in the pews. [The N.T. part of our Bible lists some 27 gifts in all. There’s nothing stopping us from adding to this list such as the gift of a genuine smile, the art of listening, what about the question – “how is it with you?” and wait for the answer.]

Today’s reading mentions five gifts.

Some are APOSTLES. In Paul’s time these individuals would go from place to place – that’s what the word “apostle” means. Referring to individuals who were authorized to go from place to place to share their experience with others, to share their personal story with others. That’s what it means to be an apostle.

Others have the gift of PROPHECY. They are prophets. This does not mean that they have the gift to predict the future, but rather they have

the gift of saying something that is not only timely, but also good for time to come. We often hear of people say: “When this person speaks, I listen”, that’s because that person has something worthwhile to say. They are prophetic. What they have to say is prophetic.

Others have the gift of saying a good word. They light up the room when they enter. That’s what it means to be an EVANGELIST. The ability to share good news.

Others are PASTORS they have the gift of taking care of people, just like a shepherd takes care of the sheep.

Others have the gift of TEACHING, they have the ability to explain things, and those of us who are listening cannot help but say – now I know what you mean, now I understand.

These are the seven gifts that Paul mentions in this chapter. Here is the punch line - each of us has been given a special gift, not in order to boast, or to feel good about ourselves, or lord it over fellow members, or cause divisions in the church but **“to prepare all God’s people for the work of Christian service.”**

We are at the receiving end of these gifts. Gifts that come from both clergy and lay people alike in the congregation. Or, if you prefer, we are blest with these gifts in order that we may serve the world of our time. When it comes right down to it, the Church is not an end in itself, but a

means to an end, the end being to prepare people for service. This was my friend's disappointment in the Church of his time. It did not prepare people for service.

[This message was given by George C. Vais on October 9, 2022 at Lake Joseph Community Church]