



Sermon, July 30, 2017  
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## Connecting in Ministry

**Ephesians 4:1-16** New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

**4:1** I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

**7** But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. **8** Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

**9** (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended[a] into the lower parts of the earth? **10** He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) **11** The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, **13** until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. **14** We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. **15** But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

**Have you ever wondered what our children experience in church? Here are some examples:**

A kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom of children while they drew. She would occasionally walk around to see each child's artwork. As she got to one little girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was. The girl replied, "I'm drawing God." The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like." Without missing a beat, or looking up from her drawing, the little girl replied, "They will in a minute."

A Sunday School teacher asked her little children, as they were on the way to church service, "And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" One bright little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping."

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A ten-year old, was becoming quite knowledgeable about the Bible. Then one day she floored her Sunday School teacher by asking, "Which Virgin was the mother of Jesus? The Virgin Mary or the King James Virgin?"

One particular four-year old prayed, "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."

Another little boy was overhead praying: "Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am."

Well, we can't always help what our children inadvertently think when they come to church, but we can be intentional about what we HOPE they will learn.

Paul in the passage of his letter to the Ephesians that was read earlier this morning talks about God giving gifts to different members of the church. He says, "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."

The ministry we are developing is all about building up the body of Christ here in Junction City United Methodist Church. Using Paul's language, it is all about equipping all you saints out there. I know you might not think of yourselves as saints, but when Paul talks about saints, he means all of us who have come here to this place yearning for meaning and purpose and hungering to know God and feel his love in our lives. That is precisely what a saint is. A saint is one who has been touched by the grace of God and has encountered Jesus Christ in any one of a number of ways such that their life is recharged, renewed, reborn.

The core of our purpose in connecting in ministry has 3 basic points when taking our cues from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

1. God does the equipping for ministry
2. Ministry builds up the body of Christians
3. The goal is unity in Christ, knowledge of Christ

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This leads into the next point of connection – connecting with the world. But it is important for us to grow in unity as a community of faith, to deepen in our knowledge of Jesus Christ, because that process also prepares our hearts for engaging the world.

So, the flow from Connecting with God (worship and prayer) to Connecting with Others (fellowship) to Connecting in Ministry moves the discipleship process from those things that build us up as individuals to those things that build up others – that is, into a realm of serving others. Serving others occurs in two realms: within the body and outside in the world.

Paul describes particular forms of ministry that build up the body of Christ:

1. Apostles – originally refers to those who are sent with a mission or purpose, often representing the one who sent them. In the early church it tended to include the requirement of having been witness to the Risen Lord, and of having been commissioned by him to go. By extension to us, then, it can mean those persons who have a powerful experience of God to share with those who do not know God or Jesus.
2. Prophets - people who are connected with God who have message from God for the members of the Body of Christ.
3. Evangelists – people who specifically proclaim in word and deed the Good News of the Love of God found in Jesus Christ.
4. Pastors: those who act as leaders of the congregation or gathered community (care for the congregation, seek the lost, and combat heresy (see TDNT, VI, “πολιτην,” p. 498).
5. Teachers – in same group as “pastors.” Job is to teach the gospel, instruct the congregation.

Service in ministry these days includes working on committees, teaching classes, helping lead worship, singing, helping with youth activities, caring for this building, doing the stuff with Congregational Care, etc.

Paul goes on and describes the goal of Christian discipleship: “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament

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with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." To summarize or bullet-point this:

1. Our goal is to grow into Christ
2. Every part promotes this growth
3. Knit together by every ligament – there is that word related to religion. The “religious” stuff we do is this ligamentation, this rebinding.
4. Love is the defining character of this work. If it is not loving, it is not part of Jesus Christ. If it is not loving, it is not the work of ministry.

The goal of it all is to make the immense, all-encompassing, inexhaustible love of God known to every person on earth. Our purpose as a church is to provide the nurturing context wherein the Holy Spirit forms disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Connecting in ministry equips us to become a *caring community of Christians where we accept, renew and change lives by sharing God's love in ways that make a difference in our world.*

Some years ago, Dr. Karl Menninger, noted doctor and psychologist, was seeking the cause of many of his patients' ills. One day he called in his clinical staff and proceeded to unfold a plan for developing, in his clinic, an atmosphere of creative love. All patients were to be given large quantities of love; no unloving attitudes were to be displayed in the presence of the patients, and all nurses and doctors were to go about their work in and out of the various rooms with a loving attitude. At the end of six months, the time spent by patients in the institution was cut in half.

Our world batters and bruises us. We come to church not because we are whole persons but precisely because we aren't. The work of religion is all about rebinding that which is broken and torn. We are all like the patients in Dr. Menninger's hospital, and we have been given the same instructions as Dr. Menninger's staff was given by our Great Physician: “Love one another as I have loved you.” This is what Connecting in Ministry is all about – loving one another as God has loved us. Is there anything better to do in the world?