

## ***Growing Up in Jesus series ~ A Study of Ephesians***

Wk 4: *At Center Stage of History* - (Drawing from Eugene Peterson's *Practice Resurrection*)

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - March 21, 2021

This morning I'd like to highlight three aspects of Jesus' work using three words: Ascending, Descending, and Gifts. Jesus ascending to the throne where He rules from the center of history, the Holy Spirit descending to unify God's people under Jesus' Headship, and His gifts given to us to help us grow into this unifying work.

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians writes from heaven to earth and back again. He writes of the ascending Jesus, the descending Holy Spirit, and our unity in Jesus. Paul shows that Jesus is tirelessly bringing everything and everyone together and we are participants in this urgent and needed work.

After the Holy Spirit descended on the first disciples, they became participants in this plan of God's making, this plan of reconciliation. Now Paul in Ephesians wants us to take seriously our growing up in Jesus. No infants among us, please. He wants us to grow up in Jesus. He wants us to be mature to **"the measure of the full stature of Christ"** (Ephesians 4:13).

Developing into maturity in life usually means a person can be given responsibility. As we mature, our gifts help us grow even more capable of doing good for us and for others. Many have said that an extended adolescence is one of the challenges of our time in history. We need to

be real men and women who can handle responsibilities. We all want maturity, we want to be capable of using our gifts, and handling our responsibilities well, we gain a sense of purpose for our lives when we do.

As Jesus' Church: prolonged adolescence is not what we need; lacking maturity is not what we want. Maturity means we take on responsibilities that fit our gifts, because, as Paul writes, we are to **"no longer be children"** (Ephesians 4:14). We need to grow up in Jesus.

Growing up in Jesus means we're able to be used for His good purpose to reconcile all things to Himself. When we were young infants we received gifts of love, food, clothing, and shelter; gifts of nurture, education, and training. Gradually these gifts develop into the strengths and responsibilities of maturity. The same for Christian maturity. We gradually learn to enjoy and use what we have been given. We grow up, so that with our strength and our understanding, we can choose to participate in Jesus' work. With our strength and understanding, we can take up and accept that part of our purpose is to bring unity and reconciliation. This reconciling work is part of our witness as Jesus' people.

Remembering and knowing this God given work, we the Church can live robustly, not timidly. These gifts and this maturity are not to be a burden, remember Jesus said His *"burden is light."* Rather, these are about choosing to live life on purpose, with purpose. We can choose to be about

His reconciling work in our neighborhoods and community. Jesus ascended on high and then descended to us with gifts: the gift of Himself, the gift of His Holy Spirit, and gifts for participating in His reconciling plan.

The gifts Jesus gives to His Church help us join in His plan. The gifts include: wisdom, healing, prophecy, discernment, teaching, exhortation, compassion, generosity, and mercy. While these are necessary for enjoying a good life, note: they are also mostly unsensational in their use. Like doing acts of mercy doesn't get much attention, but it does truly help with reconciliation. Then if these are not so flashy, there is a commonality in function, which together make them vital. Eugene Peterson says, the diversity of gifts put together under Jesus' Headship adds up to a unity of function.

I'd say it, we have a unity of purpose. The Church includes all these gifts and under Jesus we work together with a unity of purpose: As His Church, we're about God's plan to reconcile the world to Jesus. However small or unnoticed our part is in that reconciliation, we all play a part with our words, our actions, and our gifts.

We mature, so we can use these gifts working alongside Jesus in our world. We are His people on Sundays, but we probably more often use these gifts during the week. Your wisdom has helped you navigate your career and matters of finance, retirement, family, and more. These

gifts have been a blessing to you in many areas of your life. You can thank God for them.

Growing up in Jesus means we are able to use these gifts alongside Jesus in His Kingdom. What a dignity it is to be His Body, His Church, working alongside Jesus. Paul writes of five more gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Ephesians 4:12 says, these are for the **“building up of the body of Christ.”** These are some of the gifts with which Jesus equips His Church. These gifts equip us to work alongside Jesus as His Church.

Now what does this all mean? We are being invited into a working relationship within the operations of the Trinity. This is important to understand. Too often these gifts have been understood only individually. I have this gift. You have these gifts. Then someone says a guilt statement like, *“So you’d better get busy.”* That’s putting the emphasis on the wrong place. This is not a message about guilt found in Ephesians. These are not chores that must be done. Maturity is not about guilt. Our maturity is not a burden. It’s not something we have to do, before we go enjoy our day or life. We are invited into the work of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, because this is how we were made to live. There’s dignity and purpose knowing we’re called to work alongside God. There is a unity among the gifts, none are more important than the others, all our gifts add up to the Body of Christ together.

Through these gifts of the Holy Spirit Jesus provides a community for His people. I think we could say, just having a healthy church like ours is a gift in our world, when so many people are not gathering or not allowed to gather for worship. People gathering in Jesus Name is evidence of Jesus bringing everything and everyone together under His Headship. This is our hope.