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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 28, 2014
16th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 17:1-16 Luke 11:5-13

Hymns: 239; 457; 400; 50:2 (244)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:8-16

8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

9 (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Care or neglect?

How do we perceive Jesus' Ascension. At the time the disciples didn't want to see Him go. They wanted Jesus to stay visibly present, physically present with them so they could see and touch Him. They would have insisted that was what would be necessary for Jesus to take care of them, for Jesus to care for His kingdom. However that was not the case. Their understanding was limited by their perceptions. Jesus understood what was best for us, that we might be properly cared for. So the Apostle Paul looks at the victory which Jesus won, the victory displayed by His ascension and how -

THEME: Jesus Takes Care of His Church.

When Jesus ascended to His heavenly home it included His –

I. Providing Necessary Gifts

Our text opens with a quotation from Psalm 68 concerning Jesus' ascension and the victory His ascension displayed. **Jesus led captivity captive.** By nature because of the fall into sin, we were all enslaved, held captive by sin and its consequences. We were brought into the captivity of the **fear** of death. By His death Jesus died once for all. He died for you, and rising again He brings us newness of life. Ascending to heaven as our victorious Savior He held death captive. He destroyed the fear of death. Now we are here to live to Him, to live because He lives.

To provide for us spiritually during this life Jesus gave gifts to men.

Ephesians 5:11 “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

Jesus gave gifts to men. First Jesus gave gifts to individuals that they might be able to serve their brothers and sisters in Christ as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Some of these

offices are no longer present in the church but each requires certain gifts to comprehend the Scriptures, and the abilities to teach and preach, and guide others with the Scriptures through the maze of this life.

And so these individuals are themselves the gifts to the church which the Lord Jesus gives to take care of His people, and advance gospel of Christ in this world.

There is so much that these gifts to the church provide as blessings from the Savior: instructing the young, comforting the sorrowful and the troubled, administering the sacraments, preaching the gospel. All these things are precious to God's people and a special privilege for the called servants to perform.

Where we need to be careful is in our tendency to think, "Well that pretty much wraps it up. Church is taken care of. I can go and receive what I need, and as long as I receive with gratitude and appreciation I am fine. My needs will be met! My part is done."

That's not the way it's supposed to work. That is not the Lord's plan for taking care of the Church. He didn't leave it to a few. He doesn't leave it to the pastors and teachers alone today any more than the Lord left it to the apostles alone in the early days of the New Testament Church. In the earliest days of the church it was already realized in Jerusalem that the Apostle's needed others to handle certain aspects of the work so that they could dedicate themselves to the preaching of the gospel.

What the Apostle Paul makes clear is that the Lord's way of taking care of His people is by --

II. Equipping the Saints for Their Work of Ministry.

Ephesians 4: 12-13 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

The goal and objective of pastors and teachers and other called church workers is to bring others along in their understanding of the truth of God's Word, to build them up, to make the body of Christ stronger. It is all about equipping others to do the work of the Lord. To this end we are to instruct and lead the Lord's people in the unity of faith. Even when we are very different people from different backgrounds with different abilities and interests we are the family of God, brothers and sisters in Christ who are to be ready to serve and help one another as we live in the unity of faith.

Equipping others for the work of ministry starts with leading them in God's truth, and establishing them in God's truth, and then helping them find the gift God has given them so that they might serve the Lord, fully committed to care for His people.

We start with building an understanding of what God has done for us in Christ. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). "While we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24).

It is only when we know this glorious truth, and this truth, this wondrous, gracious truth has taken hold of our hearts that we can live for righteousness, and live to serve others, and be the ones through whom the Lord Jesus continues to take care of His Church. **This gospel service is what life is all about.** It is not about bigger houses, and newer and faster cars, and fancier clothes, or sports, or temporal careers. It is about serving the Lord by serving His Church. We owe Him our lives for He alone saved our lives for time and eternity! "*We* are not our own for *we* were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), a price far more precious than we could ever fully comprehend. We could never even begin to show Him our gratitude for all He has done for us and won for us by dying for us and rising again.

The Lord takes care of His people by --

III. Raising Us Up in His Truth.

Ephesians 4:14-15 “We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—.”

Have you ever been told that it is time to grow up? At some time in our lives we probably all have. We probably didn't like it either, because it implies that we are not as grown up as we would like to think we are. Spiritually, we are not as grown up as we could be, or should be and will be. There is always room for growth, growth in the knowledge of the truth is the first aspect that the Lord addresses in our text. We shouldn't, indeed the Savior doesn't desire to leave us with a simple faith knowing only basics. He wants us to grow in faith so that we have a fuller comprehension and appreciation of the wonders of His grace in the gospel. The natural tendency of our flesh goes the other way, to think “I know enough. I don't need to study more. I've got other things to do that are either more pressing, or more fun.” The writer to the Hebrews addressed that attitude among the early Christians in no uncertain terms.

Hebrews 5:12-13 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

I've heard the mission statement of a church that sponsors a radio program on public radio. They state that they are open to all wherever they may be on their journey of faith. What are they communicating with that? Simply put, they are telling people that you can each have your own truth. My truth may not be the same as your truth, and my truth today may be different from my truth tomorrow. That's not right. It's not right because it's not “**my**” truth. It's the Lord's. He presents His truth to us in His Word. He tells us what is right and good and beneficial, and what is wrong and evil, and harmful for us. He warns us that evil will bring swift destruction. He promises that His truth will set us free from sin and death.

The Lord supplies our need for a fuller knowledge of the truth so that we are grasping the truth and not falling for any spin from the philosophy of the world. Then, having been so blessed by the Lord, we are ready to take the next step. We have to grow up in meeting the responsibilities which the Lord has given to you as well as to me. The Lord desires that we –

Ephesians 4:15-16 grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

How does the Lord take care of His Church and each of its individual members? He does it by blessing each of us with a knowledge of the truth, and abilities to do our part. Each member of the body, and He is using an illustration of the human body, each part of the body has its own individual function for which it was designed, and is most capable to perform that particular function. You know hands were not designed and given by the Lord for walking. Yes, there are people who have developed a pretty good knack for walking on their hands, but is that really the best way to get around? And yet that is all too often the way we think about the church and providing for the needs of others. There are way too many people trying to walk on their hands when there are people who are the feet sitting on the sidelines. Is that really the way the Lord desires to take care of His people, by a few struggling to do that which they are good at and also these things which they may not do so well, functioning in ways for which they were not designed? The Lord has raised us up spiritually to find our place in the church. Recognize the gift the Lord has given you, and **use it** so that through you the Lord might take care of His people.

This isn't our burden. Jesus' yoke is easy. His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). He has loved us all, and He cares for us in our every need. He has given us life, and has blessed us with gifts and abilities that we might serve Him, as He directs us to take care of His people. This is our joy, our purpose, a blessing that gives real meaning to this humble life, until we join Him in heavenly bliss.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.