

Grow Up! Has anyone ever said that to you? Well in my younger years, I often heard this comment, sometimes with slightly different words such as: Don't be a baby; Grow up; Stop crying; Get your act together; You're so immature; Stop being an idiot; Put on your big girl pants! Growing up is hard to do, isn't it? It requires letting go of childish ways. It requires discipline, awareness, hard work, compromise, and letting go of the belief that "life is always fair." In fact today, one of the most distressing developments is the young adults who fail to launch, refusing to work hard in order to gain independence. Many women in their 20's and 30's are lamenting that there are not enough available men out there who want a family and are willing to commit their lives to embracing a wife and children. However, growing up is not limited to social development. It is also a requirement for people of faith who want to make a difference in the world.

In today's reading from the letter to the Ephesians, Paul (or a disciple of Paul) tells its church members to "grow up" and to mature into the likeness of Christ. The Greek word used is *auxanó* (αὐξάνω) which means to increase, to become greater, to grow, to mature in the life of faith. Paul warns about no longer being children, "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, and by their craftiness in deceitful schemes."

During the 1st century when this letter was written, the city of Ephesus was a major trade route, an important commercial center situated on the west coast of what is now called Turkey. It was the 4th largest city in the Roman Empire with a great climate and a population of over 250,000 people. It was a city dedicated to the goddess Artemis. Many years earlier, Paul had begun an effective missionary ministry in this city. However, overtime, these newly minted Christians began to waver in their devotion to God and their love for one another. This diminishing of love was causing difficulties in this fledging church that needed to "grow up" if it was to survive. So what advice would you have offered to this struggling community of faith if you had written a letter to the Church in Ephesus some 2000 years ago? What instructions might you suggest today to any church that needs to grow up, to mature in their life of faith? Well, let's take a closer look at today's reading which speaks of love, unity, and the sharing of spiritual gifts.

First, Paul begs the people to lead a life worthy of the calling to which they have been called. (vs. 1) What exactly is the life to which Christians are called? It's all about love, isn't it? Love of God, love of neighbor, love of self. "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them... Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen." (1John 4,5) Our baptismal covenant, to which we have committed ourselves, details just how to express this kind of love: We are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons as we strive for justice, peace, and the dignity of every human being. (BCP 305) Remember, "we live in a world of outrageous pain. And the only response to outrageous pain is outrageous love." (Marc Gafni)

Second of all, Paul tells the congregation to be united together, to function as one unit. They are to make every effort "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by being humble, gentle, patient, and bearing with one another in love." This of course can be quite difficult in a church community where there are strong personalities, personal preferences, and differences of political opinions. For example, there are some who want to return to some idealized time in the past, hesitating to move forward in new ways. Others do not feel heard, pouting on the sidelines, rather than discussing their issue in a mature way. But Paul reminds everyone of us, that there is to be no division within a church community. Instead, we are to speak the truth in love and grow up in every way, maturing into the full stature of Christ. ONE is the operating word here. Unity, not uniformity, is a requirement for any church to remain on solid ground. "There is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all through all and in all."

Finally, Paul mentions the need to share our gifts in order for the Church to grow and mature. Each one of us has been given one or more spiritual gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are abilities given to human beings to get God's work done in the world. Spiritual gifts are the means by which God's ministry happens through us. A talent may or may not be a spiritual gift; what makes a talent a spiritual gift is its use. In today's reading, there is a short list of gifts needed to equip others in their faith journey such as apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. However, this list of gifts is expanded in the Book of Acts and the letter to the Corinthians as well as other parts of Scripture. The remainder of my sermon will focus on this topic of spiritual gifts that God has given to each one of you for the building up of the Church, the body of Christ.

How many of you have been watching the Olympics? One of my favorite swimming events is the medley relay in which four swimmers from each country form a team to compete for a medal. Each team has four swimmers doing four different strokes: Back, butterfly, breast, and free. While each stroke is different, all of these strokes are needed in order to win the race. Each swimmer on the team commits to swimming the best that he or she can in order to gain that medal. If any of the swimmers slack off, then they will all lose. There is no one stroke that is more important than another. All are important...just as the gifts that each of us has been given for building up the Church!

I am proud of you, the people of St. Luke's, who have risen to the challenge of running this church in the city of Atascadero without a rector. It took some time in coming, but eventually all of you realized "if not me, then who?" It is a different model from what you had been used to when you had a full-time priest overseeing most of the ministries. But here you are today, continuing your outreach ministries, praying for one another, visiting those in need, taking the reins of leadership, making sure the liturgies continue, running a pledge campaign, paying your bills, maintaining the church building, and organizing the vestry of the whole. I am also impressed with those of you who are committed to learning how to operate the technology each Sunday so that the homebound can participate in the Sunday liturgies. In fact, you have one of the best video systems in our deanery and that you should be proud of.

But as you transition into a new chapter of your life with a new priest, everyone must continue to be diligent in sharing their spiritual gifts so that St. Luke's will thrive into the future. Is there an additional gift that you can offer now or are you willing to explore a new gift that you didn't even realize you had? For instance, one of my gifts is the gift of teaching. I never wanted to be a teacher nor did I think I had that particular gift. But looking back on my many years of education, I often thought about how I would have taught a lesson differently in order to bring more clarity to the subject. When I became a priest, I was in charge of running the children's Sunday School. I focused on how to best teach the children to become disciples of Christ. When I became a rector, I spent extra time in writing my sermons and teaching adult education in ways that would be easily accessible and hopefully transformative. What hidden gifts might you have that could benefit this community of faith as it matures in its faith journey?

In today's bulletin is a list of spiritual gifts. Let's take a look at these gifts together. (*See attached list & discuss*). The more we share our gifts, the stronger we grow in our own faith journey. And when we share our spiritual gifts freely, we discover that we have additional gifts that we never imagined we had. So when you go home today, spend some time looking at this list and see what more you can offer. Ask yourself, "what changes do I need to make in order to lead a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called?" Reflect on your original mission statement which claims, "St. Luke's Atascadero is a community where love is expressed and experienced through generous hospitality, joyful and musical worship, service and mission, generous stewardship, and spiritual growth for members of all ages." Finally, take the time to envision the kind of church you want St. Luke's to grow into as you bear one another in love.

"May the Holy Spirit who has begun a good work in you, direct and uphold you in the service of Christ and his kingdom." (BCP 419)

SPIRITUAL GIFT DEFINITIONS: NETWORK VERSION, WILLOW CREEK, IL

- A= ADMINISTRATION**= The divine ability to understand what makes an organization function, and the special ability to plan and execute procedures that accomplish the goals of the ministry. (I Cor. 12:28, Acts 6:1-7, Ex. 18:13-26)
- B=APOSTLESHIP** = The divine ability to start and oversee the development of new churches or ministry structures. (I Cor. 12:28-29, Eph. 4:11-12, Rom. 1:5, Acts 13:2-3)
- C=CRAFTSMANSHIP** = The divine ability to creatively design and/or construct items to be used for ministry. (Ex. 31:3, 35:31-35, Acts 9:36-39, II Kings 22:5-6)
- D= CREATIVE COMMUNICATION**= The divine ability to communicate God's truth through a variety of art forms. (Ps. 150:3-5, II Sam. 6:14-15, Mark 4:2, 33)
- E=DISCERNMENT** = The divine ability to distinguish between truth and error; the ability to discern the spirits, differentiating between good and evil, right and wrong. (I Cor. 12:10, Acts 5:1-4, Matt. 16:21-23)
- F=ENCOURAGEMENT** = The divine ability to present truth so as to strengthen, comfort, or urge to action those who are discouraged or wavering in their faith. (Rom 12:8, Acts 11:22-24, Acts 15:30-32)
- G=EVANGELISM** = The divine ability to effectively communicate the gospel to unbelievers so they respond in faith and move toward discipleship. (Eph. 4:11, Acts 8:26-40, Like 19:1-10)
- H=FAITH**= The divine ability to act on God's promises with confidence and unwavering belief in God's ability to fulfill His purposes (I Cor. 12:9, 13:2, Heb. 11:1, Rom. 4:18-21)
- I=GIVING**= The divine ability to contribute money and resources to the work of the Lord with cheerfulness and liberality. People with this gift do not ask "How much money do I need to give to God?" but, "How much money do I need to live on?" (Rom 12:8, II Cor. 6:8, Luke 21:1-4.)
- J=HELPS** = The divine ability to accomplish practical and necessary tasks which free-up, support, and meet the needs of others.(I Cor 12:28, Rom.12:7, Acts 6:1-4,Rom16:1-2)
- K= HOSPITALITY** = The divine ability to care for people by providing fellowship, food, and shelter. (I Pet. 4:9-10, Rom.12:13, Heb.13:1-2).
- L= INTERCESSION**= The divine ability to consistently pray on behalf of and for others, seeing frequent and specific results. (Rom. 8:26-27, John 17:9-26, I Tim. 2:1-2, Col. 1:9-12, 4:12-13.)
- M=KNOWLEDGE** = The divine ability to bring truth to the body through a revelation or biblical insight. (I Cor. 12:8, Mark 2:6-8, John 1:45-50.)
- N=LEADERSHIP** = The divine ability to cast vision, motivate, and direct people to harmoniously accomplish the purposes of God. (Rom. 12:8, Heb. 13:17, Luke 22:25-26)
- O = MERCY** = The divine ability to cheerfully and practically help those who are suffering or are in need, compassion moved to action. (Rom. 12:8, Matt. 5:7, Mark 10:46-52, Luke 10:25-37.)
- P = PROPHECY** =The divine ability to reveal truth and proclaim it in a timely and relevant manner for understanding, correction, repentance, or edification. There may be immediate or future implications. (Rom. 12:6, I Cor. 12:10, 13:2, II Pet 1:19-21)
- Q = SHEPHERDING** = The divine ability to nurture, care for, and guide people toward on-going spiritual maturity and becoming like Christ (Eph. 4:11-12, I Pet. 5:1-4, John 10:1-18.)
- R = TEACHING** = The divine ability to understand, clearly explain, and apply the word of God, causing greater Christ-likeness in the lives of listeners. (Rom 12:7, I Cor. 12:28-29, Acts 18:24-28, II Tim. 2:2)
- S = WISDOM** = The divine ability to apply spiritual truth effectively to meet a need in a specific situation. (I Cor. 12:8, James 3:13-18, I Cor. 2:3-14, Jer. 9:23-24.)

Other Spiritual Gifts not included in the assessment:

- HEALING** = The divine ability to be God's means for restoring people to wholeness. (I Cor. 12:9, 28,30., Acts 3:1-16, Mark 2:1-12.)
- INTERPRETATION** = The divine ability to make known to the body of Christ the message of one who is speaking in tongues. (I Cor. 12:10, 14:5, 14:26-28)
- MIRACLES** = The divine ability to authenticate the ministry and message of God through supernatural interventions which glorify Him. (I Cor. 12:10, 28-29, John 2:1-11, Luke 5:1-11)
- TONGUES** = The divine ability to speak, worship, or pray in a language unknown to the speaker. People with the gift may receive a spontaneous message from God which is made known to His body through the gift of Interpretation. (I Cor. 12:10, 28-30, 13:1, 14:1-33, Acts 2:1-11).