

Rev. Jerry Deck
Ephesians 4:11 – 16

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Ephesians 4 the Church

Today is the last Sunday to nominate for elders and deacons and so I've been thinking about elders and deacons, the officers of the church, this week. One of the questions I sometimes get in this time of the year, when people have been nominated and there not sure whether they're up for the task, is what exactly it is to be a church leader. What things do you do, in other words. These are good questions, of course, and while I'm not going to go into great detail on these things, I do think it's good to reflect from time to time on the call of pastor, elder or deacon. The reality, of course, is that if we are going to be a strong and unified church, as we talked about last week, then we need strong and unified leaders of the church who know what they're supposed to be doing. Fortunately, this is a topic that Paul likes to talk about, including in our passage this morning. So, what does Ephesians 4 say to us as about the call of church leaders?

Well, let me begin by telling you quickly about one of the greatest gifts I have ever received. It was one of the two Christmases that I spent on the island of Guam and so I was either 7 or 8 years old and the year was 1981 or 1982. Can you guess what the gift was? It was an Atari 2600. It came with two cartridges, missile command and space invaders. And my sister and I played space invaders all day and night. In fact, that Christmas Night when I went to bed I could have sworn that someone was still playing the game because I kept hearing the noise of the invaders, but I went out and sure enough no one was playing, it's just that I had played so much that day and evening that the sound would not stop reverberating in my ears.

And actually, the reason I'm telling you about that is not so much because of how great it was, but is because when my sister and I came out on that Christmas morning we totally missed seeing the Atari 2600. What we saw was the Christmas tree and the few presents under the tree. And so there we were looking at the Christmas tree and those little presents under it. We looked at our parents who were looking at us and then over toward the television and then at us and then at the television and then at us until finally one of us looked over and realized that we had completely missed this great gift that was just a few feet away from us, but we had simply overlooked, primarily because we had been distracted by the sparkly Christmas tree.

I tell all of that, not just because I want you to know that I was really, really good at Space Invaders, but because of the fact that in many ways I feel like part of a leader's role is to be like my parents and to help others see that there are great gifts that they have been given that are within a few feet of them, actually usually inside of them, if they would but have the eyes to see them. So often folks are distracted by the sparkly things around them, by the busyness of their lives, by their own self-doubts

that they fail to see how the Lord has gifted them. But, of course, as Paul said in the passage last week, each of us, each of us, have been given gifts of grace, which in this context really means equipping grace, gifts that can be used for God's kingdom. But all too often I discover that folks either don't see the gifts they have or they don't see how the gifts they have can be used for God's glory.

It's why one of the things I love to do when I meet with inquirers is to ask what gifts they have and how they can be used by God? So one of the jobs of leaders that we may not always think about is to help others to discover these gifts, to point them out and to celebrate how God is using them. In other words, one of the roles of a leader is not necessarily to *do* everything, but is to help others to see their call to do things. Some call it delegation, but I call it helping folks to see just how gifted they are!

Before moving on I do want to say a couple more things. First, I want you all to know how amazed I have been in this last year or so with the many gifts within this community. The gifts of wisdom and generosity and creativity and passion is really pretty remarkable and so I want you to know that I have found it a daunting and yet wonderful task of seeing your gifts at work. Secondly, as we were thinking about gifts this week, and our call to help folks understand their gifts, a few of us thought it would be a great idea to remind you all that we have a Spiritual Gifts inventory on our website that you can do in order to help you answer some of that. And actually if you are in home group we encourage you to do that before your meeting so that we can talk about what we discovered together. Either way, whether you are in a home group or not, just go to the front page of ZPC's website and follow the link to seeing how you have been gifted by God.

So, a part of the role of leaders in this church is to lift up, point out and celebrate the gifts God has given to you all as individuals and to us as a community. A part of the reason why we do that is because of what we see in verses 11 and 12. These verses say that we have leaders so that they can, "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." What is important here, and what I am most concerned with us getting wrong, is that the leaders are here to *equip*.

As I was thinking about that this week I couldn't help but think about what my guess is all of us are familiar with, Deflategate. This of course is of great interest to us in the Indy area and, if you have tickets to the game against the Patriots next October I would recommend you sell them for a nice profit! If you don't know what this is about, basically there's been much ado about whether or not an equipment manager and ball boy helped to deflate footballs so that they would be easier for the quarterback, Tom Brady, to hold onto. As you might imagine this is the most publicity that an equipment manager has gotten in who knows how long. While millions know the name of the quarterback, Tom Brady, merely a handful of people would have known the names John Jastremski or James McNally. It makes sense really, because the quarterback is the main person in the action, on the playing field,

while the equipment manager and ball boy are in the locker room or on the sidelines doing everything they can to make sure the quarterback is performing well.

Nothing seems odd to us about any of that, but if I were to ask you who in the church is the quarterback and who are the equipment managers or ball boys, I wonder what most church-goers might answer? The reality, of course, is that what has happened is that we have all too often made church leaders, and especially pastors, into the quarterback, into the main player, into the one who does all the action, rather than making him what he is supposed to be according to Paul which is the equipper of the body, you all. In other words, you are the quarterback and wide receiver and lineman, and as we've discussed before, when you go from this place you are going out into the playing field. But we have all too often flipped the script and because of that I think that many of our churches are failing to grow into the maturity and full stature of Christ that Ephesians calls us to.

And so a part of the role of leaders as churches is to make sure that we do not forget that we are the equipment managers who are here to make sure that we are equipping you all to be the best team for Christ that you can be. This church is not and cannot be about me or Scott or anyone else, but has to be about how we become a body that is fully in action for Christ out in the world. But I'm convinced that the more we see me or Scott as being Sean Sullivan (the Colts equipment manager) and the more you can become Andrew Luck, the more we will be working properly, the more we will grow into the full stature of Christ. Remember, we are at our healthiest as a body when this church is Christ's church and Christ's church alone and when all of us as players are out getting in on the action.

So, leaders help to point out the gifts that each of us have and they help to equip, through teaching, through opportunities to serve, through loving, that help the church to be the body of Christ it is called to be. There is one more thing that I think is absolutely vital for leaders of the church and it may just be the hardest thing we have to do and that is to be examples of what it means, to use Paul's word, to speak the truth in love. And that, sisters and brothers, is no easy task, because few of us are good at that tension. We tend to go in one direction or another.

Some folks specialize in telling the truth, at least as they see it, and are often oblivious who is hurt by what they are saying or how they are saying it. I had a parishioner at a previous church who, with great bravado, would gloat about the fact that unlike other people *she* was not afraid to say exactly what she thought. In fact there seemed to be little that came to her mind that did not make it out of her mouth at some point or another. And while she wore it as a badge the reality is that she had hurt so many people in the way she said things that she no longer received a hearing from anyone. One of my suggestions for leaders (and for all of us) is that we think through not only what we are saying, but how we are saying it and whether or not this is ultimately going to build up the church body in love.

On the other hand are those who will do just about anything in our power to not tell the truth lest we hurt someone and they think we are unloving. One of the things I've discovered is that church leaders oftentimes find it hard to say "no" to people when they bring ideas. They may be great ideas and they may be wonderful projects but we simply cannot do everything if we want to be a body that is working properly and following the mission that God has given to ZPC. And so, sometimes as difficult as it may be, we have to be willing to say no, not in order to be mean but for the forward progress of the church body.

Sometimes we also don't speak the truth because we are afraid of conflict and so we just remain quiet or we act like we agree even when we don't. Of course, the church body does not always make it easy because so often when there is disagreement or conflict it is easier to leave than to engage, despite our disagreements. This is again, it seems to me, why Paul keeps bringing up unity. There is a freedom, it seems to me, to speak the truth in love, when you know that the person with whom you are speaking is not simply going to walk out after you've spoken the truth in love to them or vice versa. They may not agree, but that doesn't mean they can't still be unified in spite of that disagreement.

But speaking the truth begins, first and foremost, with love. As Paul says, ultimately our desire is to be built up in love and if there was one requirement that I ask for when it comes to whether or not one should be a leader here at ZPC it would be do you love Jesus and do you love us here. In other words, do you desire to see ZPC flourish and grow and become the church that Christ has called us to be and are you willing to look past your own personal desires in order to help us get there? What I have discovered so far in pastoral ministry is that if people know that you love them then they will forgive your inadequacies, your shortfalls and your mistakes, because goodness knows that we all, myself especially, have them. In other words, don't wait until you're perfect to be open to leading because that, quite frankly, will never happen.

For the church to be strong, and that certainly includes ZPC, as Paul so poignantly points out, we need good, strong leaders. We need those who can help to point out the giftedness of others, that they may experience the Spirit working through them. We need those who are not afraid to be equipment managers, who get a special joy in seeing others discover what it means to be out in the world as Christ's body. We need those who love God and others so much that they will know when to speak truthfully and when to be quiet, when to encourage and when to challenge, when to build up and when to push outward. We need those who simply love this body of faith and who long to see it continue to grow in stature as we stand in into the fullness of Christ who is our head. May it be so. Amen.