

October 3, 1999

Scripture: *Ephesians 4:14-16*

Sermon: *There is No Appendix in the Body of Christ*

Every year we emphasize one of the purposes of our church. It is not that we forget the others, it is just that we highlight one to call attention to it and what we all ought to be doing all of the time. A couple of years ago our emphasis was on discipleship and growing, this past year it has been on outreach, and this next year, as we turn into the new century our emphasis is going to be on us doing service for other individuals. This morning is kind of the kick off for that emphasis and you will begin to hear more and more about it. In your bulletin this morning there is an insert. We are going to ask you at the close of the service to fill out a couple of blanks on that and turn it into the offering as it comes by but we hope that you will begin in a few moments after I speak to look at that and to see what response you wanted to give.

Now I would like for you, if you would, to turn in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians, Chapter 4. We read part of it in our responsive reading but I wanted to read the rest of it. And we will read Ephesians Chapter 4. We will begin in Verse 11. It says it was he who gave some to the apostles and prophets, some to the evangelists, some to the pastors and teachers and this is the purpose, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the son of God, and become mature, attaining the full measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants. Tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up in him who is the head that is Christ. From him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as every part does its work. Christianity always has trouble in helping people to understand its basic message. And when you begin to see how Christianity goes from country to country you begin to understand how it has to fight against the prevailing concepts of that culture. Christianity is always counter culture and Christianity is always alien to how we think. So when you identify the prevailing culture of a country you will see that that culture wants then to mold and to shape Christianity in the culture. And that's the reason there is always a struggle and a fight between the two. If you would identify the prevailing culture in the United States it is individualism. We pride ourselves in that we are individuals. We pride ourselves in our rights. We pride ourselves that we can do whatever we want to do. And one of the problems then is that when we come to Christ and come to the Scripture is to understand that sometimes we can actually shape Christianity to make it something that it never meant to be. Let me show you how it works. Sometimes it affects

our relationship in concept to God. Since we are the focus of attention, then what we begin to think is that God exists for us. And God's purpose is that he is to provide for us all of our needs. So our prayer is, God give me health, and God give me blessings, and God provide for me and then we become very mad at God if he doesn't give us everything that we are supposed to do. You see, I mean, he is the unlimited credit card in the sky, and if he doesn't do everything we want then we begin to wonder where is he and what is he doing. And because he becomes that way he becomes like our bellboy in the sky and we jingle a little prayer and expect him to run and take care of everything that we need and our prayers are something like this - Lord, gimme, gimme, gimme, gimme, forgive me, Amen. Now sometimes we so emphasize individuality that it affects how we relate even to other believers. Now I understand when people who are famous, someone comes to them and says tell me about your faith and they will say, well my faith is so personal and so private I would rather not discuss it in public. I understand that answer but I also understand that the Christian life was never meant to be private. I hear people who emphasize individuality say something like this, "Well, you know I can be just as good a Christian by not going to church." And what they are saying is, Christianity is just me, and just me and my relationship to God and I don't have to be around others and I don't have to be involved in others and all of a sudden we begin to be aware we are changing the basic message of the Christian faith. The third way in which it affects us is that sometimes we even think that all of the blessings are for us and we just hold onto them and keep them and thank God for them every night. We happen to have a man in our church who owns a truck line. Let me give you an illustration from his business. Suppose he came by your home, picked up some of your material, you told him here is where you wanted it delivered and after about a week you hadn't heard anything so you contacted him and said, "Hey, where's my stuff?" He said, It's down at the terminal. In fact, my business is so good I'm having to build more terminals. I'm having to keep everything." And you said, Now wait a minute, I gave you that so that you would take it somewhere else. He said, "Oh, I thought you gave it to me so I could put it in my terminal."

Many of us in our Christian life almost make that mistake. We think God's blessings are for us. So we just build bigger rooms. We thank God for everything. When he says, what I have done, I have given it to you to pass through you to pass on to others and until we come to recognize that then we are going to become hoarders and keepers of God's blessings, and trying to share them to other individuals. Now when you come to church we will talk a great deal about individual rights but we emphasize more than anything else is we talk about individual responsibilities. Just as the country gives you a Bill of Rights, the country when you come to church wants to give you a Bill of Responsibilities that as God has blessed you and helped you that then we become stewards of his blessings so that we can pass them on to someone else.

Now what Christ called us to be is that Christ called us to be servants of others. Now just not when something big happens. Every Sunday I can get in this pulpit and say, "Listen, an earthquake happened in a certain part and there are going to be people at the doors. Will you give for the earthquake?" I know you well enough to know you will just pour out. I can tell you they need blankets in Kosovo and we can have a whole truckload of blankets. We have helped to fill up sea containers to send to people in tragedy. Now as wonderful as that is, that is really not much different than the Rotary Club. We need to understand that Christ did more than to call us to respond to tragedies. Christ called us to adopt a lifestyle of asking the question, how can I help? And we begin to understand that a very vital part of our very existence is to be a servant to others. Listen to what Jesus said. Jesus said, *If you lose your life, if you give away your life, you are going to gain life.* When he talked about himself he said, *I am not come into the world to be served, but to serve.* You will recall that the night before, just before he did the Lord's Supper some of his disciples were over arguing about position and power. They got so involved in the position and power that they realized that nobody had performed the oriental custom of taking other people's sandals off and washing their feet. They were so interested in all of their position and power they forgot about service. And you will recall they all were astounded, Jesus put the towel over his arm and he started going around to try to tell them. Christianity is not about position and not about power. Christianity is about service to others. And until we come to understand that, we haven't understood the basic concepts of what it means to be a Christian. Now listen to what our scripture said today. God said, *I have put people in the church so that they can help you to understand that you are to be a servant to others.* Now I have read that scripture thousands of times. Let me tell you my basic understanding of my role in this church. My basic role in this church is to help you to understand that God has called you, equipped you, blessed you for a purpose and to get you involved in that ministry for him. Judie and I have been blessed to have four children. One of our children is already in heaven but three of our children have grown up to be mature adults. When our children were small we would feed them and clothe them and take care of them but when our children began to get a little older, I remember Judie going into a room one day and our boys were there and Judie said, "There are some clothes on the floor." And they said, "Thank you for calling that to our attention," and they walked on out. And Judie said, "No, come back. It is time you learned that you've got to pick up." And we began a process of helping them to understand no longer are we going to do everything for you. You are going to learn to do things for yourself.

Then we moved into the second phase. And that is, you don't just do things for yourself. You do things for others. And so we would give them money and we would say, "Now I want you to take that money and

we want you to give it to this and we want you to give it to that, we want you to get involved in this, we want you to help in others, what were we doing as parents? We were helping our kids to become normal mature selfless kids. Now why has God sent people like me to you? For the same reason. To help you to understand that you are to grow and develop.

There comes a time when people ought to stop doing for you and you ought to do for yourself and then there comes a time when you begin to serve and to minister to others. Maturity comes to the point where you say, now is my opportunity to serve others. Now if you always want other individuals to do for you, then that is a pretty good indication of your own level of maturity.

The second thing that he said for us to do and that is, as you grow and as you minister then you begin to recognize your responsibility to others. And he says, as you are beginning to do that you are beginning to grow and to develop. Now you know that if you are going to play athletics it is very important that you ask yourself a question. Is this an individual sport or is this a team sport? You say that is stupid. Well let me show you. About once a month, I play at golf. People ask me all the time what is your handicap? And I say me. What I understand about golf is I am playing myself. Sometimes I keep my score and I lie to me. I mean, what am I trying to prove? I'm playing for me. Golf is an individual sport. I went this week to a high school football game. Earlier this fall a coach got those boys together and looked them in the eye and said, "This is a football and we play as a team. Get that in your head. We play as a team." And after every game he pulls them aside. Did you know you are on a team? You were out there playing for yourself. You are part of a team. Now wouldn't it be foolish if a person got on a football field and just got running up and down by himself? You would know something is wrong with him. Welcome to church. What is church? What is the Christian life? It is not individual sport. It's team sport. We're part of a team. And only as we come to recognize that how we interact with each other and how we serve each other, only then are we going to be able to develop and grow. And until we learn that, then we are just not going to recognize what the basic concept is of what we are called to be. And only as we do that will we have the opportunity to be able to understand that that's how we grow. Listen to what the Scripture says, Only as you serve...

I don't know any other way to tell you. The reason we are going to challenge you to serve others is that's the genius for growing up. It's easy to just sit on the sidelines and say, well let somebody else do it. But if we let you do that we consign you to always being immature. Somebody said to me one day, I wish you would get off my back. I said I am not trying to get on your back I'm trying to get in your heart. I am trying to help you to

understand that only as you serve and as you get a part can you do it. And in this team concept, we begin to develop and grow. I don't know how many body parts I have. Let's suppose I have 3000. And suppose you came to me and said, how many of your body parts are working? I got a bunch that are not doing as well as they used to. I say, well, I've got 3000 body parts. And then you ask, how many of them are working, and I say, oh about 1500. You know what you'd do, you'd call 911. Somebody comes to me on a regular basis and they say, "How many body parts does Bon Air Church have?" I say, "About 3000." But I know only about 1500 of them work. And let me ask you the question. How healthy is that? Do you understand as a church member that God sent you here? He sent you here for a purpose. And that we will never become what God called all of us to be if you as one of the body parts don't do your work. You need to understand that if you do not do what God called you to do it's not you who are affected. It's everybody else that is affected. Just as if all of a sudden my heart decides not to work, my lungs may be fine, but because my heart doesn't work my lungs are affected. When you don't work you affect everybody else. And we can have the most dedicated core of workers in the world but if we have a whole group of folk who are not functioning as God wanted them to do then the whole core is affected. Now here is the good news. God never asked you to do anything in your own strength. Good, wonderful news. God never asked you to do anything in your own strength. Whatever he asked you to do he will provide you the strength and the ability to do it, and that is called a spiritual gift. And I've got news for you. When I went to school they told me that they had never figured out what the appendix purpose was in your body. It's just there but it doesn't have a function. I've got news for you. There are no appendix in God's body. Every one of you have a purpose. Every one of you have a gift. Every one of you have a function. And you can determine what God wants you to do whenever you say, "God, now what is it that you have given me and how can I use it and how can I develop it?" And all of us, every one of us have been given a gift so that we can be used to find out how we can be used to serve others. You heard what the Lucas' said a moment ago. They thought you had to go to seminary to figure out what to do. And then all of a sudden they realized that they could do it themselves. God had gifted them. And now they are doing acts of service for other individuals.

You remember the Christmas Carol? It's about a little boy that has a bad leg and all he possesses is a drum and we call him the little drummer boy. And he heard the Christmas story about the wise men and the shepherds and the little boy looked at his drum and he said, "What can I do?" And you remember how the carol tells the story and finally gets to the end and he says "If I was a shepherd I would give a lamb, if I was a wise man I would do my part. But I am just a drummer boy. What can I give?" And the carol ends by, "I can give my heart." You know what God

wants from you? Just your willingness. He wants your heart. He will give you the strength. He will give you the ability. He will give you the power. All that he wants is you. You say, Lord here I am. I don't know what I can do. I don't know how you have gifted me but I know now that you have. I want to give you myself. I want to ask you to help me to use what you have given me for others and when you begin to get out of yourself and become a minister in God's strength for God's glory then you begin to grow in your Christian life. There are people that I am talking to this morning. God has been working in your heart and you say, "You know what I need to do today? I need to come forward and say I am a Christian." You need to publicly confess your faith. There are people in this room that God has been leading to come and visit this church and you say, "You know, I feel God is leading us here and we want to get involved and we want to be in active service and we want to reach out to others," and God has been saying to you now that's where you need to get involved and you are going to come this morning to say, "We are going to get involved." Most of the people in this room are our church members. Some of you have been on the sidelines. A body part not working. Not working as you ought to work. Maybe today is a good day for you just to come forward and say, "I don't know what I have but I want to give Him my heart," and I want to say, "Lord, take and use who I am and what you have gifted me and use me for your glory. We are going to stand together and sing a hymn of invitation. This is your moment to respond, your moment to say yes to God, your moment to do what he wants you to do. And we pray that as his spirit works in your heart that you will come forward now, "Will you?"