

“GEARING UP”
Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Peter 3:15
May 27, 2018
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 4:11-13 New International Version (NIV)

¹¹So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

1 Peter 3:15-16 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁵But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

INTRODUCTION:

Last week, I asked the question:

**What if this Church is being prepared spiritually
to begin spreading the Good News
in a more powerful and convincing way?**

**Well, in my opinion,
that is exactly what’s happening in our church!**

**I believe God is presenting us with opportunities
to grow the Kingdom of God and to grow the Church.**

**Therefore, I believe we must be ready –
- geared up and prepared –
- to meet God’s challenge.**

I have challenged the elders with memorizing –

- and meditating upon – the heart of the two scriptures
we are examining this morning.

I now issue the same challenge to you!

Begin memorizing:

Ephesians 4:12 – “equip the saints for the work of ministry”

1 Peter 3:15 – “Be prepared to give a reason for the hope you
have in Christ Jesus.”

EQUIPPING:

It is my belief –

- based upon Ephesians 4:12 – and 30 years of ministry –
that one of the most important functions of a church
is to *equip* folks to do the ministry
to which God has called them.

From time to time, when time allows,

I will play a computer game or two.

The games I like best are those that pit good against evil.

Of course, I am always the “good” player

- either the computer or another player - is the “evil” one.

Very often, it is the *equipment*, that leads to victory.

Next time you see a Navy Seal depicted on TV or in a movie,
notice the equipment that Seal carries.

From head to toe that Seal is fully equipped.

That’s no accident.

Their survival, their success, depends upon being equipped.

On a simpler level,

it is the *equipped* teacher that is the most effective;

it is the *equipped* student who rises to the top.

In the world of work and careers,

it is usually the one who shows up *equipped* and prepared

who gains recognition and promotions.

It is *exactly* the same when dealing with leadership in the church!

The better the leaders are *equipped*

the better they are able to lead

and the more effective the church can become.

So, how do leaders become equipped?

And how do leaders equip the church?

The answer is simple,

but it requires a lot of effort.

First of all, do you know what is your spiritual gift?

Knowing your spiritual gift allows you to do the work

to which God has called you

without burning out or becoming resentful.

Think of it this way:

Let's say you own two horses.

One is an Arabian - the other is a Clydesdale.

You try to race the Clydesdale

and pull a wagon with the Arabian.

What do you think the outcome will be?

In the same way,

**if someone with a gift for teaching
tries to labor in the property area –**

**- or someone with carpenter skills
becomes saddled with administrative tasks -
the results will not be as good as it could be.**

**Knowing your spiritual gift allows you to seek training
in the area in which you are already gifted.**

More on that in the future.

For now, let's just concentrate on the basics.

Next is learning how to pray.

Or maybe I should say, learning how to *listen*.

**There is nothing more important in doing the Lord's work
than *listening* to what God is telling you what the work *IS!***

The centering prayer group is an excellent start.

Third, have a vision.

You know the old saying:

**If you don't know where you are going,
how will you know when you get there?**

Or Zig Ziglar's famous:

"If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time."

**We are in the process of formulating a vision for the Church.
You will have a major role in developing that vision.
Then you will be asked to support that vision.**

More on this later, also.

**In order to bring that vision to reality,
requires us to *focus* on the vision
and not get distracted.**

We are all getting to the “age of distraction.”

**We get up in the morning, stretch a little,
try to remember where we left our glasses.
Failing to find them, we head out for the paper.**

**We discover there is no paper,
so we head back in for a cup of coffee.**

**We pour the cup of coffee and reach in the fridge for the creamer
and there is our paper!**

**We take the paper and the coffee over to our favorite chair,
and sit right on our glasses!**

**We get distracted.
It's not so much a *memory* problem
as it is a *distraction* problem.**

**Bringin God's vision for the church to reality
is going to require focus –
- keeping your eyes on the prize.**

And finally, have a positive attitude!

Have faith in the process and pour positive energy into it.

**Nothing - absolutely *nothing* – will kill a vision
faster than a few folks with a bad attitude
who grumble a lot.**

A pastor friend of mine

used to refer to folks like that as “soul vampires.”

He used to say they sucked the soul right out of him.

DEFENDING:

Let’s move on to 1 Peter 3:15 –

“ . . . be *prepared* to give a reason for your hope . . . ”

Another way to translate that passage is:

“ . . . be *prepared* to *defend* your beliefs . . . ”

This is the foundational verse for *apologetics*.

***Apologetics*, in this sense does not mean apologizing-
- saying you’re sorry.**

***Apologetics* is an academic term which is**

**“the religious discipline of defending religious doctrines
through systematic argumentation and dialogue.”**

That sounds so academic,

when what it really means is

you have wrestled with your beliefs,

you have a rational basis for what you believe

and you can articulate what it is you believe.

You do not have to be academically trained to achieve this!

**But you *do* have to engage in study, prayer, meditation,
and dialogue with others.**

It is as much about *listening* as it is *reading*.

**Take advantage of the educational opportunities
which are – and will be – offered by the Church.**

**I hope we can develop some programs
that lead to a more solid understanding of our faith.**

**As we grow closer to God
we will also grow in personal holiness –
- and that holiness will be noticed by others.**

**Now, I'm not talking about the kind of holiness
practiced by the Pharisees –
- the kind that is focused on promoting the self.**

**I'm referring to the quiet faith
that is evident in what we *do* and what we *say* –
- the way we treat others
- the subject of our conversations
- the care and support we offer each other**

**Sooner or later that will be noticed
and we will have the opportunity to explain
why we conduct ourselves in that manner.**

**The answer, of course, is we are not trying to please others,
we are simply honoring Christ.**

**And *that* kind of holiness will often require a defense –
- or at least, “to give the reason for the hope that you have.”**

**And when you are asked *why* you are doing something,
have the courage to say: “Because God calls me to do this.”
And then – *then* – be prepared to defend your answer.**

**We shy away from giving a theological answer
because we are not *equipped*.**

**We are afraid we might not say the right thing,
or a theological answer will lead to a theological discussion –
- and we aren’t prepared for that.**

**And because we are not properly *equipped*
we try to blend in to the rest of the world;
hoping no one will ask us *why* we do things.**

**If you are doing something simply because it is *good* for humanity
or because it is the *right* thing to do – the *ethical* thing to do -
- bless you.**

You are doing a good work.

**However, it is quite different
to do the *same* thing as a *response* to the love of Christ.**

**When you do something – anything – as a response to Jesus
and the blessings Jesus has promised,
you are doing something far greater than mere *good*.**

**You are making an *offering* of your time and talent.
You are responding to God!**

**You are not doing it to please others,
you are doing it to honor Christ.**

**And *that* kind of holiness will often require a defense –
- or at least, “to give the reason for the hope that you have.”**

Here is a promise:

**The better you are prepared to defend or explain your faith
the more opportunities God will present to you
to share your faith with someone else.**

Think of it this way:

**I believe that God is constantly calling people
into a saving relationship.**

**What do you think the chances are
that God would trust someone *unprepared*
to share their *unprepared* faith with those people?**

**If you needed health care,
would you rather have a college freshman
planning to pursue a career in medicine?**

Or someone who has completed their training and residency?

CONCLUSION:

Christianity can *never* be a private thing!

Let me repeat that: Christianity can *never* be a private thing!

It was never intended to be *private*.

**Christianity is not a “gold medal” we get rewarded
and then do TV commercials and write a book.**

The mandate is not:

“Go into your homes and celebrate your victory in Jesus.”

The mandate is to:

**“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing
them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy
Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have
commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20**

The mandate is to “Go!”

And that mandate *assumes* we are *equipped* and *prepared*!

**The better a person is equipped and prepared,
the less fear that person will fear when speaking for Christ.
And the more people God will bring across our paths
who are seeking deeper meaning in their lives.**

As Presbyterians,

we believe that God calls us into relationship with Him.

We don't *accidentally* find ourselves in that relationship.

And God uses us – *US* - to explain faith to others.

There are a lot of lost folks out there.

**There are a lot of folks who have been hurt by a church –
- a lot of folks who *need* to be part of a Christian family.**

It is no accident that this is such a wonderful Church.

**God has been working through each of us
to bring this Church to the point it now is:
loving and inclusive.**

I strongly believe,

**God is calling this Church to step out in faith
and share the good news with the community.**

With folks God has prepared to hear that Good News.

Gear up, folks.

a new day is coming!