

Ephesians 4:7-12 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

⁷But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

⁹(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended^[a] into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

Building for the Future

I have been reading recently about "The Cathedral Principle." Have you ever heard of that? It was a new concept to me, even though it has been around for centuries. You see, the principle was named for its common use during the Middle Ages when so many of the great European cathedrals were built. Now I consider KUMC to be a grand edifice, and yet, the building is quite small when compared with the massive cathedrals of European fame. They were so large, that it was not unusual for the construction of these cathedrals to last 70 – 100 years. The builders and laborers who began the construction of the cathedral would not be the ones who finished it. Yet, when they began, the first builders would plant oak trees, so that seven or more decades into the future, when timbers would be needed to complete the cathedral, the trees would be ready for harvesting. **The Cathedral Principle** – planting decades in advance of the anticipated harvest. These builders were visionary, forward thinking, and ready to invest in the future that they would likely not ever live to see. They were **"Building for the Future."**

And while these builders of the Middle Ages were focused on constructing a facility that would serve to house the ministry of Christians for generations into the future, there were others who were building for the future by investing in the spiritual growth and leadership capacity of those Jesus-followers who would be equipped to do the same for future generations. These were the ones of whom Paul spoke when describing those gifted by the Holy Spirit so that:

"some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,"

We, too, are called to be visionary and forward-thinking, those who are erecting buildings or preparing souls for carrying on the ministries of Christ in the world. We, too, are called, as Rev. Gerhard reminded us last Sunday, to be filled with hope in Christ for the future that God has planned. We, too, are **called to use** whatever gifts have been entrusted

to us, the life skills we have been privileged to develop, the faith that has kept us going when times were joyous and when the outlook was bleak, our trust in God's future, and the resources we have to share. Why? So that Kaitlyn's children, and McKenna's students, and Noah's co-workers, and Nicholas' neighbors, and Cole's medical team, Ari's interns, and Hannah's clients.....will have opportunities to learn about the love, mercy, grace, and salvation of Jesus Christ!! We are planting proverbial oak tree seeds (acorns) of faith and hope in order to build the church for the future that is yet unseen.

When I first arrived in this community and began to get acquainted with this blessed congregation, we held ten "Front Porch Fellowship Gatherings." Over 90 persons participated in these informal, small group gatherings to share our stories. I asked folks to respond in two ways: **1. to describe how a ministry of KUMC has nurtured a growing faith in you;** and **2. to describe how you might you envision Kenmore UMC ministries connecting faith and life in our community and world in the future.**

Most of you can easily guess the predominant response to the first conversation. The number 1 response of a ministry of KUMC that had nurtured a growing faith in folks was: Youth Ministry. MYF, mission trips, special outings, youth Sunday School and Confirmation Class. All of these offered faith- and life-shaping experiences and growth in relationships with Christ and peers, that prepared folks for faithful discipleship for decades to come! Thank God for the visionary folks who invested their time, energy and ministry in you when you were youth. Thanks be to God for those who continue that vital ministry even today. Because they were, and we are, building the church of Jesus Christ for the future. We are investing in developing faith leaders for future generations that **we** may not live long enough to meet. We are influencing those with the potential to be tomorrow's apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers who will continue to equip even more saints for the work of ministry. We are planting oak trees today that will provide support for the church that WE BELIEVE will flourish, but that we may never see.

Friends, that is what faithful stewardship is all about. Each year when we are invited to complete a pledge card for the support of the ministries of Kenmore United Methodist Church, we are pledging our faith in the plans that **God** has for bringing our ministries to fruition that will hopefully outlive us, and we are stating that we are willing to invest in that faith, hope, and trust. Our Visioning Team has blessed us with the discernment of a Vision Statement to equip this congregation for ministry into the future. It is a Discipleship Plan that can grow the faith, ministry, and transformational influence of this congregation for decades into the future. You know how it goes:

Knowing Jesus Christ

Uniting a Community

Mentoring in Faith

Caring through Compassionate Hands and Hearts.

This statement is Christ centered, ministry enriching, and future oriented. And in order to equip this congregation to live into this Vision, we need to be willing to generously underwrite its ministries. Our scripture text reminds us that the church of tomorrow is being built today. The text speaks about the grace (Greek – charis) of spiritual gifts (charismata), and inferring that each Christian has something to offer the body of Christ.

God decides what gifts to give each person, and that is precisely why each one in the church is important. Here, Paul focuses on leadership gifts: being visionary, inspirational, witnessing, being invitational, helping others to learn about and understand the ways of Christ so that faith may be applied in all aspects of life.

A paraphrase of our scripture text states:

[God] handed out gifts above and below, filled heaven with divine gifts, filled earth with divine gifts. [God] handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to [Christ], fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.¹

You are invited to practice the Cathedral Principle as we engage in Building for the Future of Christ's church together. There are oak seeds (more commonly known as acorns) reserved for our planting and building. Each time you see an acorn or seed during this autumn season, consider your role in planting and building for the future of Christ's church. Let's not fear getting our hands dirty or investing our hearts in relationships that may disappoint us. Rather, may we connect with our Creator as we build and plant, plant and build, teach and nurture, nurture and teach, together, for the future of Christ's reign on earth. Amen.

¹ Peterson, Eugene *The Message*, Ephesians 4:11-12 (adapted RBS).