

**“Body Builders” - Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16 – Pastor Jeff Childs**

It seems this is a letter written from prison as indicated in the first verse. The Apostle Paul (and others) were imprisoned for the faith. The writer wants to build up and encourage those on the outside. We are worthy! Why did Jesus die on the cross? The classic understanding is to pay the debt for the sins of the world. But a post-modern understanding would look at this text to reveal a deeper meaning. The death signifies the value Jesus places on you and me. The sacrifice is not so much paying the price as it is showing the value. You are not worthless. In the eyes of a loving God, you are priceless. Jesus died for you, for you to know your worth. You are Worthy! The writer here wants us as readers to know that. And if you know that, then you ought to live a life worthy of your calling - to live the abundant life of Christ. As you come to receive communion this morning, receive that tangible reminder that Jesus died so that you might fully live. Receive him and the fullness of his love for you. Pause and pray and rededicate living your life fully and abundantly for him. As the writer of this letter put it, “*Live a life worthy of the call you received*” [to follow Jesus.] Christ died that you might do “what”, with your life? Live it fully each day in grateful appreciation.

By the time this letter is written there seems to already be a structure of some sort in the early church. This is one of the reasons that some scholars think this letter was written after the time of Paul. By the time this letter is written it says in verse 11, “*that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.*” Back in Jesus’ day there were just his disciples or followers. Early on at Pentecost they then became the apostles a term meaning “ambassadors,” those who go out in the name of another. Paul added himself to their number after his conversion and his mission trips. Our youth were disciples who were apostles sent to Puerto Rico just a week ago. And even if we are sent to a mission in the area, that makes us apostles – as we are sent out in Jesus’ name! We should live a life worthy of that calling. The text goes on to say that some of us have been given the gift of being prophets. That does not mean telling the future – though we are looking for people with that gift as we try to get a vision of where God wants us to be in the future. Prophets, strictly speaking, are people who speak God’s word. Prophets speak up to say what they believe rather than silently going along with the crowd. They may often be ridiculed or ostracized, but prophets have often been treated that way, think of Daniel, John the Baptist, and even Jesus. You who are prophets, live a life worthy of your calling. And the list goes on with evangelists – those who tell the “evangel” or “good news” in English, and pastors and teachers. All of these gifted people are gifted for two reasons. The first was to “*equip God’s people for serving!*”

Do you know you are gifted by God? Do you know your God-given spiritual gifts? If you would like to know, I invite you to take a look at the bulletin insert. It is not an exhaustive list but a beginning to see the gifts you have been given. (And as you read the list allow God to call to your mind other people who have each of these gifts!) If you do not know your gifts show other people the list and ask them which ones they see in you. You might be surprised! Once you know your gifts, let’s figure out how to put them into ministry!

The second reason why we are so gifted by God is to “*build up the body of Christ*” – the church. We are Spiritual Body Builders. The lesson for today speaks of how we are to build one another up in love as we treat each other with kindness, patience, humility and love. We all know the old adage from the movie “Bambi.” After little Thumper says something about Bambi’s wobbly legs he’s reminded by his mother what she has been teaching him. He dutifully repeats, “if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” I wish most politicians had mothers who had taught them that! It seems that we focus on the latter half. Our silence is deafening! Now silence is better than negativity and tearing the body down. But silence does not build up. What if we took seriously this admonition to build up the body in love? Might we find ways to put in a good word? Perhaps the new adage could be, “if you can’t say anything nice, keep thinking until you come up with something!” One of my favorite songs from my childhood is “Home on the Range.” One line rings in my mind today, and you know it, “where seldom is heard...a discouraging word.” Now I will grant that “seldom” is better than “often is heard!” I have been to places and churches like that where the discouraging words do not build up, and in fact often tear down with comments like, “That will never work,” or “We’ve never done it that way before.” I spoke a couple weeks ago about the Rev. Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and his book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Today how might we come to practice not only positive thinking but unleash “the Power of Positive Speaking?” How about a church home, “where often is heard...an encouraging word!” Today, before you leave the building, say something encouraging to someone. Point out the spiritual gifts you see in them. Offer encouragement for family members, co-workers, neighbors, and even strangers! How might we build up and lift up one another in love? Share a good word with someone. Put in a good word about someone. Put in a good word about Jesus. Share the “Good News!” Alleluia and Amen.

### **You’re the Creator**

Jeffrey B. Childs 7/31/2024

You're the Creator who has made me,  
Made in your image most lovingly.  
Filled with your blessings your will uplifts,  
That I might use your spiritual gifts.

I have been gifted like all of us,  
That I might share the love of Jesus.  
Worthy of your call help me to live,  
That all for you I'll thankfully give.

Help me use my gifts in all I do,  
To equip people for serving you.  
In times when much is disparaging,  
Help me to share words encouraging.

Positive speaking is in my power,  
Help me speak out each and every hour.  
By the things I say, through words I choose,  
Help me find ways to share the Good News.