



## Assembly Weekend Sermon, June 12, 2016

This sermon has also been created to allow its use in the coming months for worship supply to be read or to show the video.

### **First Reading - Acts 1:1-11 (NRSV)**

#### **The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

<sup>1</sup>In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

#### **The Ascension of Jesus**

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

### **Second Reading - Ephesians 4:1-16 (NRSV)**

#### **Unity in the Body of Christ**

<sup>1</sup>I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup>But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." <sup>9</sup>(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>We must no

*longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup>But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

## Sermon

*+Bishop Jon V. Anderson*

Today's sermon will be built on the lessons from Acts 1 and Ephesians 4.

Thesis: God builds up the body of Christ through many gifts so that we might be united in faith and mission.

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Grace to you and peace, gifted brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. Amen.

I was on a run at the Regional Wrestling meet my junior year in high school. I had pinned and defeated several opponents. In the semi-finals my opponent tried to roll me from a standing position. In slow motion, my shoulder struck the mat. As it hit, my shoulder dislocated and a bone broke. It was unbelievable how bad it hurt. It was a hard journey. Six weeks later, after having my arm in a sling, the muscles in my arm and shoulder had shriveled. It was hard to look at. A few more weeks later I went to the weight room. I still remember that day. I could only lift about ten pounds with that arm. My muscles were quivering even from that stress. It was frightening. I was used to lifting a couple of hundred pounds before my accident. Eventually I rebuilt my strength in that arm and regained flexibility so that I could play football in the fall of my senior year. It was amazing how swiftly the strength had left and also amazing how quickly my muscles grew stronger swiftly and flexibility returned.

Our lesson from Ephesians speaks about "building up of the body of Christ." God is the one who embraces us when we are broken or weak. God is the one who breathes life into us when we are crushed. God blessed us with gifts as individuals and communities of faith so that we might be a part of God's mission for God's world...and to build up God's Church. God calls us to be united in Christ's love. In those times when we grow weary or break, God brings healing to us.

God loves to see Christians grow stronger in faith, hope, and love. God loves to grow our congregations deeper and wider, too. God's Spirit blows, inspiring all the baptized. God equips us to build up God's Church and sends us as the Church to love and be signs of God's presence in the whole world.

Your synod staff and governance has found it helpful to focus on one word as we seek to follow Jesus, our crucified and resurrected Lord, in this chapter of our life. That focal word is "Equip." It is from our theme Bible passage. What is a synod good for? We believe we are called to "embrace God's mission and equip God's people." We will seek to do this through deepening congregational vitality, enhancing local and global mission, and developing servant leaders.

Paul begs the church at Ephesus to lead a life worthy of its calling through Jesus our Lord. As God worked through Paul and the other early apostles, we believe God calls us to be apostles...“sent ones”... today. God’s Holy Spirit is at work in our spiritual lives day after day. Jesus came to equip us with the Good News that God is for us. God is with us even in the cross moments of our life. God created each of you...and each congregation in our synod...with gifts and abilities to build up the body of Christ and to love God’s precious world.

We often focus on the question, “How do we get people into the church?” One of my teachers argues a better question might be **“How do we send people out to be God’s church in their everyday lives** - to love all God’s people and God’s world?” We are called to equip the saints for ministry “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (4:13). Seven times the word “one” (4:4-6) shows up in this passage. We are called to be united in all our diversity around our Lord Jesus.

When we focus on planning we often ask, **“What is our vision and how do we implement it?”** One of my teachers argues, we need to ask, **“What is God up to and how do we get on board?”** We believe God has a mission for the whole world. We believe our congregations are part of God’s way of loving this world. That is why your congregations and each of you exist - to build up, grow disciples, support them, and participate in God’s mission. You don’t know if your congregation or you will be alive in ten years. But you can control how you live today. Give yourself away. In losing ourselves, Jesus promises us, we will find life.

As a synod we will focus for the next several years on these three strategic priorities as we seek to live out what we have heard from God, our people, and our context. We believe we are called to deepen congregational vitality. Congregations and the households in them are where God grows Christians. Congregations often ask, “How will we survive in this challenging culture?” but my teacher says the better question for congregations to ask is, **“How might we serve?”** Your synod believes that growing vibrant Christ-followers is the reason congregations exist. Your synod staff has come to believe we serve God best when we are equipping congregations not to run programs but rather to engage their local context with the assets and gifts God has given them. There is no evidence in scripture that Jesus came to encourage congregations to spend all their energy on themselves and their buildings. Instead we hear Christ’s command, *“Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you.”* Jesus promised to be with us always in this work.

Your synod believes we are called to “Enhance Local and Global Mission.” God cares about God’s world, and our equipping God sends us to love our neighbors in our community and around the world. Sometimes we think our goal is to save people, but that is God’s work. We are more like the bread and wine we share at the communion table, a sacrament for this world. In our text from Acts we hear the command and promise of Jesus, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” We are God’s witnesses in our town, region, country, and world. May our lives and our words proclaim the Good News we know in Jesus Christ.

Your synod believes we are called to “Develop Servant Leaders. Today’s lesson from Ephesians reminds us that the Holy Spirit has given us all gifts... particular gifts...” *“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to 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.”* (4:11-13) Maturity means we move beyond the question, **“What should the pastor do?”** or “Will we be able to find a pastor?” Maturity focuses on the question of **“What is our shared ministry in Christ’s name?”**

All the baptized are called to be building up God's Church and serving in God's mission field of their daily lives. Success or failure for a congregation is not centered on whether or not you "have your own pastor." Our hunch is that our future as a synod depends on God's ability to grow all the baptized deeper and wider in faith. God loves to develop all the baptized with servant hearts. God promises in ***Acts 1 - you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.***

When you are quivering because you are weak, remember your gracious and resurrecting God enters into your weakness to be with you and transform your lives. We are transformed as we look to God...and hear the Good News that God is for us, healing and forgiving us. God calls us to look outside of ourselves and God uses all kinds of people – people of faith, spiritual refugees, and broken people- to transform us. God calls us in gathering in community around the table and be fed with Word and sacrament...God strengthens us through the ongoing work and presence of God's relentless Spirit...Together in Christ, we have all that we need.

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The book referenced is ***Facing Decline, Finding Hope: New Possibilities for Faithful Churches*** by Jeffery Jones, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers



**Southwestern Minnesota Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.