

## **Building Up the Body, by Rev. Eric Moeller**

St. Lucas UCC, September 14-15, 2019

[Pastor Eric holds the end of a pocket watch chain and spins the watch continually.]

I'm no physics teacher, and I believe there are a couple of forces at work here, but do you remember from your science classes what the force is that keeps the watch spinning? It is centripetal force. While it's being propelled outward, it is also being pulled toward the center, toward where it is anchored. Centripetal literally means center seeking; it's a center-seeking force. Ultimately, this center-seeking force helps to build movement, it accelerates movement, and makes the ball smooth and stable in its path. It's the same force that keeps roller coasters on their tracks as they do full loops. This is where science and faith intersect. The Spirit is, in part, a centripetal force. It sends us out, certainly, but it also draws us inward to our center, and, as we follow its pull inward, movement builds and we find ourselves on a smooth and stable path. Even if we feel like we are on a rollercoaster, going upside down, following the Spirit's pull and direction inward can keep us on track. This is what the author of Ephesians is getting at; that the Spirit is a force that moves in and through us, certainly to go out into the world, but also drawing us inward to our center so in the internal sharing of the gifts the Spirit grants us, the Body of Christ, the church itself, will be built up in unity and prepared for the wider ministries to which it is called.

We often think of mission, or using our gifts for God's transformative purposes in the world, as being something that goes out from the church, but, indeed mission goes toward the church as well. Part of the calling to which we've been called, is to serve one another.<sup>1</sup>

The letter states:

*"Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift...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."*

Lists like this that we often hear in epistles aren't intended to be exhaustive, so this is not meant to say that only pastors, teachers, prophets, etc in the church are gifted by the Spirit, but rather these are some ways in which the Spirit moves in the church to build itself up. Each of us, the author says, each of us, is given something and has some role to play within the life of the congregation itself, and not for our own benefit, but for the benefit of the whole body so we can come to unity and grow to be like Christ. In our tradition we often talk about the priesthood of all believers, and this is what that phrase gets at as well. We all have value and meaningful ways to share our gifts with one another within the congregation, and indeed we are called to do so. We receive these gifts from God not for our own purposes, but for God's purposes of equipping God's people for their respective ministries; for participation in God's transformative work within and without the church. Take, for instance, Karen Papin's artwork hanging outside of the social hall presently. Those watercolors are a true gift to all of us. In her sharing of that gift, speaking for myself, she has certainly lifted my spirits at moments and given me some knowledge of God as she's revealed the beauty of God's creation in different ways. I'm certain others of you have appreciated those paintings as well. She is building up the body in the sharing of that gift. There are handcrafted wooden items from Jim Bundy as well, like a chair so a child can rest their body. There are handcrafted flies for fishing created by Bill Lowry, which could be used to catch food and nourish the

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes Blauw shared the concept of mission as centripetal and centrifugal force in his work *The Missional Nature of the Church* published by the World Council of Churches in 1962. He himself was the secretary of the Netherlands Missionary Council.

body. There are handcrafted items from Herb Bilgram, each with their own purpose, and needlepoint from Pat Stephens. These are all gifts among us that build up the body. Others of you have pastoral gifts; you are great at sitting with people when they most need, just being present and sharing conversation and you share that through our Caring Ministry, building up the body in that way. Others of you are gifted singers or musicians and you build up the body as you share your gifts in worship in the choir, or maybe Luke's Ukes, both in worship and other settings. I'm sure as those groups gather they build one another up as they prepare together. Others of you are knowledgeable in different ways and share your knowledge and wisdom with others in education and discussion settings, building up the body in that way. Again, this is not exhaustive, there are endless ways that the Spirit is working through each of us, seeking to move through us for the building up and equipping of the Body of Christ at St. Lucas, and, centrally to the message of Ephesians, for the unity of the body.

The author explains that the Spirit seeks to move in such a way that the body is joined and knit together by the ligaments of our gifts, each part working properly and growing together into Christ. This is unity, not uniformity.<sup>2</sup> We necessarily must be different from one another, each of us bringing some unique function into the body that helps to hold it together and build it up. In our differences, we are to work together, serve one another, bear with one another in love, but also help one another grow, which may mean speaking difficult truths in love, again for the sake of building up the body, not tearing it down. It means pushing each other, challenging each other, and getting uncomfortable sometimes, for growth only comes through such ways, but doing so, not by deceit, trickery, harmful hostility, and dis-ingenuity, but by authentically, openly, honestly, lovingly, and truthfully trying to figure out the mysteries of faith, discipleship, the Spirit, and its guidance together. As our time draws to a close over the next couple of weeks, I will be sharing some truths in love, and I hope you will receive them in that way, but I will also be sharing my many hopes for you. St. Lucas UCC, today my hope for you is that you can embrace the calling that Ephesians challenges the congregation with. Seek to hold accountable those who would participate in deceitful scheming, trickery, dis-ingenuity, and open hostility that seeks to harm, and embrace a path of authentically, openly, and lovingly sharing your gifts with one another, and speaking the truth in love, so that the body of Christ that is St. Lucas UCC can heal, and each ligament can function properly and play its role so that, both as individuals and a congregation, you can faithfully live out your calling to participate in the transformative work of God as a people of one faith, one baptism, one hope, one Spirit, one God who fills you all, one body living in the bond of true, just peace.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Ward, "Proper 13: Homiletical Perspective," *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4*, editors David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor. (John Knox Press), Kindle Edition, Location 10899.