

Growing Together in Christ

Ephesians 4:1–16

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“They grow up fast” – that’s what parents whose children had already grown up used to tell me when my children were little. And it’s true: they do grow up fast. One moment you’re sleep-deprived, waking every couple of hours through the night; the next, you’re dropping off at primary school.

Growth, maturity and development are part of the normal human experience. Healthy children are expected to grow, and over time they mature into adults.

Our passage today teaches that the same is true of the Christian life. Growth and maturity are what God desires for his people. When we first trusted in Jesus Christ for our salvation, we were born again and adopted into God’s family. In a spiritual sense, we began life as infants. But God does not intend for us to remain spiritual infants. As we are nurtured by God’s Word, strengthened by his Spirit and supported within a loving Christian community, we are meant to grow, becoming more and more like Jesus as we journey through life.

This message will be deliberately brief because we would like to finish the service a little earlier today in order to allow plenty of time for our Parish Mission Action Plan review discussion. Therefore, I will confine myself to a few brief observations on our passage.

In verse 12, Paul tells us that Christ has given gifts to his Church for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. The word “saints” is simply a New Testament term for God’s people – that is, the Church. This reminds us that ministry is not reserved for clergy or church leaders alone. Every Christian is called to ministry. Each of us has been

given unique gifts, abilities and opportunities to contribute to the life and mission of the Church.

As we continue reading our passage we discover that one of the primary goals of the Christian life is unity in Christ. Paul writes that the Church is to be built up “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”

There is something of a paradox here. On the one hand, we are already one in Christ. Through faith in him we have been united to Christ and to one another. Unity therefore is a gift that God has given us. On the other hand, we are called to preserve, nurture and express that unity in our life together. earlier in the chapter Paul urges believers to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Unity is therefore not only something we have received; it is also something we are called to cultivate and work out in practice through love, humility, patience and mutual care.

The unity we seek to maintain and work out revolves around knowing Christ. Jesus is the glue that holds the church together. The moment we lose sight of Christ or cease to place him at the centre of our life together, that unity begins to unravel.

Alongside unity, another primary goal of the Christian life is maturity. Paul writes that we are to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (v. 15). The alternative is to remain spiritual infants. Paul warns against being “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching” (v. 14). Spiritual maturity gives us stability, depth and discernment. As we grow in our knowledge of Christ and in our understanding of God’s Word, we become less vulnerable to false teaching and better equipped to live faithfully as disciples of Jesus.

All of this has important implications for us as a church. If unity and maturity in Christ are God’s primary goals for his people, then they must also be among our goals as a parish. As most of you know we are currently reviewing our Mission Action Plan. As part of that process we are reflecting on important questions: Why are we here? What is God calling

us to be? What is God calling us to do in this place and at this time? Whatever priorities, goals and ministries emerge from this review process, surely one of God's purposes for St Augustine's must be this: that together we grow into the likeness of Christ.

That growth is not merely individual. It is corporate. God is not simply interested in making me more like Christ or you more like Christ. He is interested in forming a community of people who, together, reflect the character, love, truth and holiness of Jesus. As we grow in unity, as we use our gifts to serve one another, and as we mature in faith, we become the kind of church that God calls us to be.

May God grant that St Augustine's would be a church that is truly growing together into the full stature of Christ.

Amen.