

I brought along a wood carving this morning that delights me, and I wanted to share it with you. Roy De Walt of our congregation made this carving of the American Golden Finch. It is so realistic I think it would confuse the housecat into thinking it had a free lunch. The long list of tools Roy uses to carve these exquisite works of art reminds us of how much we never see that goes into making beautiful things.

Ephesians presents God as an Artist, a Poet. He does not work in the medium of wood or words but of human beings in all their diversity. Ephesians 2:10 says: **We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.** Before he made the world God had in mind something beautiful in the world he wanted to create. Ephesians tells us He wanted to create a worldwide community He could call "My People." The full beauty and meaning of God's chosen people, the Church, is hidden at the present time beneath the grime of half converted human nature and the strutting pride of an unconverted world.

Like Roy De Walt's carving of the American Golden Finch, the building of God's chosen people requires an extensive workroom. Our text today in Ephesians 4 intimates the beautiful thing God has in mind, and it also takes us on a brief tour of God's workroom, where He is building this beautiful thing. Let's look at Ephesians 4:11-16.

Gifts of Leadership

Let's begin with verse 8, which says this about Christ: **"When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."** The apostle picked up this idea of gifts in verse 11 and identified five gifts of leadership that are necessary for building the beautiful thing God has in mind. Verse 11 says: **it was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.**

There are some Christian leaders today who call themselves apostles. Most of the church has stayed away from that title, because in the New Testament an apostle is someone who saw Jesus after His resurrection and was commissioned directly by Him to establish the foundations of the Church.

I believe the Church still has prophets, but in our Christian circles the name has fallen into disuse, and we treat people who call themselves prophets with suspicion. They are nevertheless in our midst, and we benefit from their insight into the meaning of events of our time.

We are much more familiar and comfortable with evangelists. We think, for example, of Billy Graham. We have evangelists in our congregation. Robert Ricci is an evangelist. Ed and Sue Rowse are evangelists. So are Pat Haney and Allen and Sharon Mercer and Rafael Anzenberger. I am sure there are others. All of us who believe in Jesus can tell other people about our faith in Jesus. Evangelists have a gift from God of being able to win a hearing even in the most unpromising circumstances. I like to think of them as the Special Ops of the Church.

We are most comfortable with pastors and teachers. We see them week in and week out. We can talk to them about our personal concerns. We can benefit from their teaching. They are part of the fabric of our lives.

John Calvin once said something most fitting about pastors and the people they serve and lead. "It forms a most excellent and useful training to humility, when he (God) accustoms us to obey his word though preached by men like ourselves, or, it may be, our inferiors in worth. . . . When a feeble man, sprung from the dust, speaks in the name of God, we give the best proof of our piety and obedience, by listening with docility to his servant, though not in any respect our superior." (*Institutes*, Book IV, 316) If it is humbling for you to listen, it is humbling for me to speak.

Who am I to speak the Word of God? Who am I to be held in esteem by men and women, who in so many ways are my betters? But somehow this arrangement works much more often than it fails. Thanks be to God!

Here's the point. Christ gave all these leaders to the church with a clear purpose in mind. **It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people, says verse 12, for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built-up.**

Brandywine Valley Baptist Church is not my gig. It doesn't exist to showcase my talent or the talents of any other person on the staff. It is our church home. It belongs to all of us, and we belong to Christ. Neither is building up the church my responsibility alone. It is the responsibility of all of us. A pastor's leadership responsibilities are crucial in building a church up. If we pastors do our jobs well, all of you will catch our passion to build up the church, and we will do it together.

Maturity the Goal

Christ gave people like me to lead and encourage and train people like you to build up the church. This arrangement takes place in hundreds of thousands of churches all over the world. Here's what's at stake. Verse 13 says that this arrangement is to continue **until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

That's the beautiful thing God has in mind for the church, but the little words **we all** make it overwhelming: **Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.** Read it this way: **Until all** of us Baptists, Brethren, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Episcopalians, Methodists, Mennonites, Catholics, Coptics, Charismatics, Adventists, Amish, Orthodox, Lutherans, and independent, unaffiliated congregations **reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.** And that doesn't begin to label the different varieties of Baptists, Presbyterians, Orthodox, and Charismatics. Do you know how different these groups are from each other in some of what they believe and how they worship? It's overwhelming.

And here's the exciting part. The spiritual maturity God has in mind for us does not require these bodies of believers to lose their distinctive personalities and become uniformly alike. Real unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God does not squelch diversity; it feeds it, allows it, and grows it.

But isn't that just a little overwhelming? Yes, but do you have the heart to see how breath taking it is? Any critic of the Church can point to the chaotic diversity of denominations and dismiss the Church as irrelevant. We are different. We have faith. We know from Ephesians 2:22 that the Church is the people God decided to make His own before He created the world. We in all our multi-ethnic, denominational diversity are the flesh in which God lives in this world. We are here to stay. That is our calling, and overwhelming or not, we all must find ways to build the beautiful thing God has in mind **until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God!**

When we set out to do a new ministry project at BVBC, we need to be sure that's why we do it. When we get overwhelmed by our efforts to serve Christ, we need to remember why we serve. We are the flesh in which God lives in this world. To live worthily of that calling we never lose sight of the beautiful thing God is creating in this world, and He is crafting it to **reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.**

Marks of Maturity

So, how do we know we are making progress in maturity? Verses 14-16 give us clear marks of maturity. The first mark is stability. Look at verse 14: **then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth with the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.**

The poster child for **every wind of teaching** is the Internet. It is a largely unregulated source of information and misinformation. If that's where you go to learn about God, it can blow you every way imaginable, and it can easily blow you off course. You need to be anchored in a stable congregation like BVBC, where there is accountability for what we teach, and where we are anchored in the great tradition of the Church that goes back 2000 years to Christ and His apostles and back another 1500 years to Abraham. Stability, accountability, and rootedness in the great tradition are how we build up the church and protect people from false teaching.

That brings us the second mark of spiritual maturity. Verse 15: **Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ.** Proverbs 18:21 says: **The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.** The choice before every congregation is pretty stark. If you are part of BVBC, you either help to uproot and tear it down, or you help to plant and build it up, and the tearing down and the building up have a lot to do with how we speak to each other and about each other. In the parking lot and in the gathering place let's speak well of this ministry and of each other. If we have problems with somebody or something in the church, let's go to that person or go to the church's leadership and see if we can resolve it directly with the people who are responsible.

Another proverb, Proverbs 27:5, says: **Better is open rebuke than hidden love.** Do you love Brandywine Valley Baptist Church? Speaking the truth in love means that you show it. Don't hide it. Don't hang back. Don't stay on the margins. Don't just take. Give. Make it a better place. That's how we build up the church together.

And that's a nice segue to a third mark of spiritual maturity in verse 16. **From him** (from Christ) **the whole body, joined and knit together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.** That sounds like teamwork to me. Christ gave people like me to lead and encourage and train people like you to build up the church. If we pastors do our jobs well, the whole church catches our passion to build up the church, and each part will do its work.

Take Aways

I have sensed for two or three years that God might be reinventing BVBC. It seems to me that God does that with this church about every 20 years. The reinvention has taken several years each time, and each time the church has emerged stronger and better prepared to face the future. It has never been the result of careful planning. It has always been a surprise that left pastors and board members wondering what hit them. That's the case this time, and that's why I sense that God may be reinventing BVBC. I also see the power of God expressing itself in our life together here. Here are some examples.

First is our MOPS ministry. This ministry to mothers of preschoolers has outgrown our facility's ability to meet the demand. So, Sue Rowse, Cristine Larghosa, Phoebe Bosma and their leadership teams started something new this fall. They began an evening MOPS for moms who work outside their homes. They had 100 women at their first meeting on September 5. They had another 100 women plus 100 children at their first morning meeting three days ago.

This past Wednesday night, Kristi Pullig, Rochelle Anderson and 45 volunteers did an open house to inaugurate the AWANA ministry to children. 85 children are registered for the ministry.

Matt Ousdahl put out the call on August 25 for anyone who wanted to do a short-term mission trip in the next 18-24 months to write on the Connection Card, "I want to go," and 100 people signed up; and none of them were teenagers, who go on short-term mission trips to the tune of 85-100 students each summer.

I have never seen a greater sense of unity and purpose within the BVBC staff and within the Board of Deacons and between the Pastoral Staff and board. The determination to work together and face the toughest situations with humility, gentleness, and patience is palpable. I've never seen anything like it.

The parts are beginning to work together. My examples and many others don't predict what the future will look like. They hearten us to believe that God is at work, preparing BVBC for a much different future. And you lucky ducks, God has permitted you to be here to witness what He is doing. Roy De Walt saw in his mind's eye what he finally carved into wood. The Lord of the Nations sees in His mind's eye what He is making out of the diverse peoples of the earth. Maybe the Holy Spirit will be pleased to remove scales from our eyes to see better what God sees and labor with Him to build it.