

Sermon Note: Nurture

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

We're four weeks into *Our Baptismal Vows*, our series walking through the promises of the United Methodist baptismal covenant one Sunday at a time. So far we've renounced the powers that diminish us, accepted the freedom God gives us to resist evil and injustice, and confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The fourth promise is addressed to the congregation rather than to the one being baptized: will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life, and include these persons now before you in your care? For three weeks we have answered for ourselves. This week we answer for someone else.

Most of us were formed by people who made that promise about us: a Sunday school teacher, a choir director, a neighbor. Few of us think of ourselves as the ones who do that for someone else now. Paul writes as a prisoner and asks a young church to live in a way worthy of the calling they have been given, describing a body that grows as each part does its own work. In Matthew, Jesus has just heard that John has been killed and goes looking for a deserted place, and the crowds follow him there anyway. When evening comes and the disciples suggest sending everyone off to buy their own food, Jesus tells them, "You give them something to eat."

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DB1rdAT27ug&start=0&end=178>

In this clip from *School of Rock* (2003), substitute teacher Dewey Finn, who has given himself the nickname Mr. Schneebly, gives every student in the room a job, starting with the boy who came to ask out.

Why This Video?

A boy comes privately to ask out of the band, because he says nobody ever talks to him, and Mr. Schneebly answers by pointing at what the boy can actually do. Then he gives him a job, a new name, and a warning that the band is counting on him. The same thing happens to everyone else in the class, including the students who play no instrument at all. Each of them walks away with a job to do, and one of them negotiates on the spot for an assignment that fits better.

Video Discussion Questions

1. Lawrence comes over privately to say he shouldn't be in the band, because he isn't cool enough and nobody ever talks to him. What do you notice in the way he describes himself? When have you counted yourself out of something before anyone else could?
2. Mr. Schneebly answers that doubt by pointing at the boy's playing. What do you think that does for someone? When has another person answered your doubt by pointing at something you could actually do?
3. Before Lawrence can say yes, he's told this is a big commitment and asked not to say yes unless he means it. What do you think about asking that much of someone who has just said he doesn't belong?
4. Even the students who don't play an instrument get a job, and each one is told the band's future depends on them. What do you think it means to someone to be counted in that way?

5. One student asks to be the band stylist rather than security, and gets an immediate yes. Why do you think Mr. Schneeibly agreed so quickly? When has someone let you shape the part you were given?
6. Lawrence is assigned the keyboards and given a place in the band. What do you think it takes for a person to take a place like that after saying they don't belong? When has someone given you a part before you felt ready for it?
7. By the end of the scene, every person in the class has something to do. How do you think that affects a group? When have you been part of a group where everyone had a meaningful part?

Ephesians 4:1-16 (NRSVue)

¹I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: ⁴there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

⁷But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

⁹(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until 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. ¹⁴We 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; ¹⁵but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from 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.

Matthew 14:13-21 (CEB)

¹³When Jesus heard about John, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. When the crowds learned this, they followed him on foot from the cities. ¹⁴When Jesus arrived and saw a large crowd, he had compassion for them and healed those who were sick. ¹⁵That evening his disciples came and said to him, "This is an isolated place and it's getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

¹⁶But Jesus said to them, "There's no need to send them away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷They replied, "We have nothing here except five loaves of bread and two fish."

¹⁸He said, "Bring them here to me." ¹⁹He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves of bread and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them and broke the loaves apart and gave them to his disciples. Then the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰Everyone ate until they

were full, and they filled twelve baskets with the leftovers. ²¹About five thousand men plus women and children had eaten.

Scripture Study Questions

1. Paul asks the church to walk in a manner worthy of their calling, with humility, gentleness, patience, and love. Which of those four comes easiest to you in your community? Which is hardest?
2. Paul writes that “each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” What could it mean that your own gift is measured out to you rather than earned?
3. Paul says that pastors and teachers exist to equip the saints for the work of ministry. If ministry is the work of the whole congregation, what does that suggest to you? Have you assumed ministry was somebody else’s job? Does this scripture change how you view ministry?
4. The body grows, Paul writes, “as each part is working properly.” When have you been part of something where one person’s absence affected the whole? What might that mean about your own role?
5. Paul asks the church in Ephesus to speak the truth in love and to grow up together into Christ. Where is truth-telling hardest in a faith community? Where does love fit into this truth-telling? Does love change how we tell the truth? If so, how?
6. Jesus withdraws to a deserted place after hearing what happened to John, and the crowds follow him there. How does Jesus respond to them? Have you ever felt needed in a moment you would prefer to be alone?
7. The disciples have a sensible plan: send the crowds off to buy their own food. Jesus tells them, “You give them something to eat,” when all they have is five loaves and two fish. What do you think of that answer? Have you ever been asked for more than you had? How did you respond?
8. Everyone eats until they are full, and twelve baskets are left over. Only then are we told about five thousand men, plus women and children. Why do you think that second count is included? Are there people who are uncaptured in our own community? Who? Why?
9. Reading these passages together, how do you hear God speaking to this congregation today? How do you feel called to respond?

Weekly Action

This week, thank God for someone who nurtured you in faith. Then choose someone you can care for before next Sunday. It might be a person in this congregation you haven’t seen for a while, or maybe someone who has no connection to the church at all. Think about what that person might need, and prayerfully consider how you might meet that need. Then act on it. Talk with a family member or trusted spiritual partner about what you did, and ask them who they are caring for.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you. You have fed us with yourself and nurtured us with your presence. Receive now the prayers of your people. In your compassion, forgive our sins, and surround us with love and forgiveness, that we may surround one another the same way. Drive us to lives of faithful service in and through and beyond the nurturing love you offer us through your church. In the power of the Holy Spirit, send us out as witnesses to your good news and nurturers of one another wherever we go. Amen.

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