

Sermon Preached by The Reverend Jonathon W. Jensen, *Rector*
Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
on the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 13, Year B
August 2, 2015



Ephesians 4:1-16

Don't you wish you had a money tree? Every time you needed something you could just give it a good shake – problem solved. Our priest, T.J., and I each received a money tree about a year ago. According to tradition, they are supposed to bring good fortune but that sounds more like marketing than truth. Unfortunately, ours don't produce any cash but they do look nice. They are great addition to the office. Because they are native to swampy areas, they are difficult to overwater and are fairly easy to care for.

The two plants we received are in church today. Do you notice a difference? J.T., the name for the more modest one, is about a week older. Jonny, the name for the other, came identically packaged and was the exact same height when they both came home to Calvary. J.T. and Jonny reside in approximately the same location on the north side of the building. They have the same soil and light, receive about the same water and, I believe, both came from Home Depot.

Both of them are fine plants. One is flourishing and the other – has potential. My thumb is no greener than T.J.'s. The only real difference between the two is the size of the pot or container. Both of these have about reached their full stature due to the limits of their current containers. They could grow to over fifty feet in their *natural* environment.

To grow into our full stature as a holy Temple of God, to be spiritually mature, is what the apostle Paul wrote about in his letter to the church in Ephesus. Most of the epistles or letters Paul wrote to church communities were to address specific problems that had arisen. The church in the city of Ephesus, we call them Ephesians, was remarkably healthy, much like Calvary. They were on the right path and were called to a deeper spiritual maturity, to grow into the full stature of the Temple or Body of Christ as he puts it.

Paul knew these people in the city of Ephesus quite well. He had lived with them for three years. He wrote to them, in about the year 61-63AD, and refers to himself as a prisoner for Christ. He meant that quite literally as he was in a jail cell in Rome for preaching the gospel. Think of this letter as what old Paul, near the end of his work and life, wants the people he loves to remember and know about following Jesus. This good news was to be lived and shared. The gospel of Jesus did move out from Ephesus and spread across Asia Minor.

In Paul's time, the city of Ephesus was the Roman capital of Asia and had a population of about 250,000. It had a great library, public baths, and a theater with a seating capacity of 25,000. That's bigger than CONSOL Energy center and it was 2,000 years ago. **The** attraction of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis or Diana that was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was made of marble except the roof and was 450 long, 225 wide, and 60 feet high. That's over twice as long as Calvary's building and slightly higher than the ceiling of our nave.

This was an important and diverse community in one of the greatest cities of the known world. What **they** said and did, how **they** lived out their faith in Jesus, mattered. They were to be an example, a model, of how to live the faith by sharing it.

Paul is trying to remind them that that church already had all the gifts it would ever need *right* there in the present community. So do we. We don't need a money tree with faith. The gifts for building up the church are numerous. Paul list apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. That list sounds really "churchy." You might think you have none of those extra-spiritual or official gifts. The important point to note is that *not one* of them is used in isolation or solely for the benefit of the one who has it. The gifts are all relational. That is, they are all **shared** for building up the Church – for knitting together every part of the Body of Christ.

Our list of spiritual gifts here at Calvary would be different but we are richly blessed in many ways. Can you pray, welcome guests, or nurture a child's faith? Can you garden, read a financial statement, or help a neighbor in need? Can you care for the Altar, sing, write a check, or make **one** person's life a little better? Can you give someone hope who had none? They all become *spiritual* gifts when they are *shared* to build up the Church for mission. Each week we take up bread, wine, and money – symbols of ourselves – and return them to God at the Altar. All these gifts are sanctified, made holy, when they are offered to the Lord.

That's how we grow into maturity, into our full stature as Christians and as a community. For spiritual gifts to grow or flourish, they have to be shared with God and our neighbor. Anything offered to God is made holy and works for building up the Kingdom.

One thing about Paul, he never dreamed small and didn't want the people to limit their potential either. Earlier in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, "You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You *belong* here. God is building a home. God's using us all – no matter how we got here... We see it taking shape day after day – a holy temple built by God, all of us are a part of it..." 2:19-22

Paul is telling them they are a part of the temple God is building through them. The temple they knew was not some roadside attraction. Their frame of reference was the beautiful, giant building they all knew from their hometown, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Their faith would become of **that** stature when they shared it – one offered gift at a time. A spiritual temple – a wonder known by all the city for its benefit – that was their natural state of spiritual maturity that God was building through them. So it is with Calvary.

Those two plants, as endearing as they are, will never reach their full, natural stature by the limits imposed upon them.

The only limit imposed upon us growing into the full stature of Christ is when we do not offer and share whatever gifts with which God has blessed us. When we keep them all to ourselves, they cease to be gifts and become possessions. All of the shared gifts knit together build a holy and spiritual temple bringing hope to the world, one offering at a time.