

**+ Ephesians 4:11-16 + The Lord of the Church Has a Plan +
+ Installation of Rev. Alan W. Gumm +
+ Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church – North Fort Myers, FL + 19 February 2017 +**

How did we get here? I'm not asking which street or highway you took to get to this afternoon's service, but how did we get to this point? I suppose from one angle, you could use the immortal words of that famous poet Jerry Garcia, "***What a long, strange trip it's been.***"¹ How else do you explain going from Wisconsin to North Dakota to Wisconsin to Wyoming to Arizona to Illinois to here? Dad, you and Mom are one of the most well-traveled, non-military WELS couples I know! You will soon have the distinction of having served congregations in all four time zones of the Lower 48! It really has been "***a long, strange trip!***"

Yet if you take a closer look, you'll notice that it wasn't random chance or accident or twist of fate that brought you to this place at this time. Look all the way back to those days when you were a little boy who ran up into the pulpit at David's Star and you see the guiding hand of the Lord of the Church. You see God's gracious hand guide history—your history, your family's history, and the history of the congregations you have served and those you are about to serve. Look back and see that all along God has had a plan of which you have been a part, a plan to guide all things for the good of his Church.

...But remember I also said "we." How did "we" get here? It's not just a new start for my parents. It's also a new start for Bethany and Christ the King. Look back and see that it was neither chance nor accident nor twist of fate that brought you to this point. Look back and see how God guided all things for your good even through hurricanes and preschool closings and pastoral turnover and lengthy vacancies.

When you're in the midst of challenging situations like that, it's tough to see how the Lord is carrying out his plan for your good. It's easy to miss God's plan that has been years in the making. Who knew when your congregations first started that one day you would decide to partner together as a dual parish for the sake of Gospel ministry. Yet here we are today starting anew.

Now you could forgive the Apostle Paul if he too failed to see God's plan that was years in the making. After all, as Paul wrote the words of our text, he was under house arrest after bouncing around a couple different Roman prisons. He couldn't personally minister to the congregations he had planted, so it broke his heart to hear about conflicts, issues, and selfish motives rearing their ugly heads. What he could do, however, was encourage them, while he entrusted their care and their blessing to the Lord of the Church.

That's why he wrote to the Ephesians. God's people there needed to be reminded who they were in Christ and what God's plan was for them. To do that, Paul used one of his favorite pictures of God's Church—the Body of Christ.

The Lord in his grace makes each believer a holy and important member of his Body. He gives unique talents and abilities, interests and experiences to each believer not so they can go off in their own direction, but to bring them together under Christ. That's been the Lord's goal all along—to bring believers together as one body with Christ as their head. Paul explains in the verses before our text, "***There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.***" (Ephesians 4:4-6)

So how do we get there? What is God's plan for people of different backgrounds and abilities, experiences and interests and cultures to come together not just as members of a congregation, but as the Body of Christ? What is God's plan not just for Pastor Gumm and God's people whom he will serve, but also for all pastors and the flocks they are privileged to serve?

Well, friends, I have a secret for you. It's really important! God's plan starts with your pastor. I know...rocket science, but consider what the Lord of the Church has to say through his inspired Apostle. "***It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...***" Dad, I have a question for you. Who made you a pastor? *The Holy Spirit*. That's right! The Lord made you a pastor. The Lord gave you life and made you his own through the waters of Holy Baptism. Yet he also instilled in you at a very early age the desire to become a pastor. He was the One who provided encouragers all along the way—a "***cloud of witnesses***" of pastors and professors and family members and friends and your bride—who cheered you on as you trained for ministry, who urged you to keep going when things got tough, and

¹ Lyric from *Truckin'* by The Grateful Dead, 1970.

who prayed for you. God used those people so you did keep going, so you did enter the ministry, and so you have faithfully served him for nearly 37 years.

That leads to the next key ingredient in the Lord's plan. We'll let Paul answer the remaining questions. The Lord made you a pastor to do what? **"...To prepare God's people for works of service..."** Pastor, your task is not to do all the work of ministry at Bethany and Christ the King, but to **"prepare God's people for works of service..."** Your job is to equip God's people with the training and tools they need to carry out **"works of service"** to their Lord, to serve alongside you in the mission and ministry of these congregations, as well as in their individual God-given callings at home and in society. That's what the Lord wants you to do, but for what purpose?

"...So that the body of Christ may be built up..." Pastor, your task is to equip and build up God's people to be what they have become in Christ, to help them grow as the Body of Christ. So how are you going to do that? Remember the Lord's goal behind this plan—to unite the Body of Christ!

The only way that's going to happen is through keeping your focus and the focus of God's people on our one Lord, on the one true faith of **"the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church,"**² and on the work of the one Spirit through the one Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Pastor, the Lord of the Church has given you tools to carry out your part of his plan. He's given you his powerful Word that takes stone, dead hearts and makes them alive. He's given you the Word that brings forgiveness and peace and hope and strength and joy to human hearts and lives. He's also given you Holy Baptism and his Holy Supper. Through those gifts, God gives his blessings of forgiveness and life and salvation. Through Baptism the Lord brings all nations into his family, and through his Supper he strengthens them to be daily living sacrifices to their Lord. Those are the tools that God gives you for your work, but for how long?

Dad, you told me that you'd like to make it to 50 years in pastoral ministry, if the Lord wills. So how long does God want you to serve? Well, he tells you and every pastor that we carry out our part of his plan **"so that the body of Christ may be built up 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."** Dad, if God wants every pastor to serve until all of God's people reach unity in the faith and all become mature to the level of the fullness of Christ, I guess that means you can never, ever, ever retire. 😊 Actually he's telling you that you won't work yourself out of a job this side of heaven. Instead, the Lord enables you with ability and experience to build up and equip his Body of believers as long as he enables you to do so.

The Lord now turns his attention from his equippers to the members of his Body. You see, this sermon isn't just for Pastor Gumm. The Lord also has something to say to his Church, to all of you from Bethany and Christ the King. The Lord of the Church has a plan for you too. If your pastor faithfully carries out his part of the plan, then God has expectations and promises for you.

If our pastors faithfully carry out their part of God's plan, **"then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."**

What's the Lord saying here? "If your pastor faithfully carries out his part of my plan, then I expect you to grow up." Yes, I know many of you have a few more years of experience in this world than I do, but the Lord of the Church still wants you to grow up—spiritually as the Body of Christ. He wants you to come to worship to be fed with his Word and Supper, to spend time in his Word in Bible study and in Word and prayer in your personal devotions, and to daily remember your Baptism—all so you and the rest of Christ's Body can grow.

The Lord attaches promises to your growth. You will grow up in faith, in knowledge, and in maturity growing from spiritual infants to spiritual adults. He will enable you to hold firmly to his Word so that you're not tossed around by every -ism or heresy or deceitful scheme blowing around out there. Instead, you will grow up as you speak the truth in love to each other and to others out in the community, not cutting each other or others down, while not hiding the truth because you're tempted to think it's the loving thing to do.

The Lord doesn't just want you to grow up. He wants you to grow together—a task particularly important for a dual parish to remember. Here's what the Lord says through his Apostle, **"From him** (that is, Christ our Head)

² From 3rd Article of the Nicene Creed

the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

If the Body of Christ is going to carry out the Lord's work, if your congregations are going to flourish again with the work that God has given to you, then you need to grow together. You need to grow together as the Body of Christ being built up with the same self-sacrificing love that God showed you in sending Jesus. That love moved him to send his Son to leave heaven for you, to take on your human flesh, to sacrifice himself for your sins, and to conquer death for you. That kind of love doesn't focus on what I want or what you want, but on what God wants. That same love moves you to grow together as the Body of Christ not pulling in different directions. It's not I or me anymore. It's we and us. So the Lord attaches promises. You will grow together as the Body of Christ built up in love and he will bless your service together in Christ.

So where do we go from here? We know where we've been. We know that the Lord of the Church has always had a plan with a promise. So now what? That history hasn't been written yet. Only the Lord knows what the future holds, and he holds your future in the palm of his nail-pierced hands. Mom and Dad, it is my prayer and the prayer of your family that the Lord richly bless this new chapter in your new home in Florida. We offer that prayer confident that the Lord of the Church will bless you as he has promised. Brothers and Sisters of Bethany and Christ the King, it is our prayer that the Lord of the Church enable you to grow up and to grow together as Pastor Gumm equips you for works of service, just as God has promised. To our gracious God be glory in his Church and in his world forever and ever. Amen.