

## New Life Living in the Lord

✝ **By doctrine: Grow up in Christ...** (vv.7,11-16)

✎ **...preparing God's ministry of gifts.** (vv.7,11-13)

✎ **...building each other up in love.** (vv.14-16)

In the name of the Lord's Christ, who gives us God's grace, dearly beloved of God:

Forty-four visits so far. After returning a Divine Call last spring, I asked to serve as the "New Pastor" at New Life. First, meet God's people. So began our "New Pastor" + Member Visits which have reached about half of our regular worshippers. My notes include comments from a hospital bed. To the question: "What would you tell someone to invite them to New Life?" she answered: "Come hear the sermons. It's a friendly congregation. I wish that I could tell you about the peace of Jesus." And what she wished to improve? "I want to get back to worship." A few days later the Lord called our sister, Patty Jo Weseloh, home to Himself in heaven. Now she worships in God's heavenly temple with Jesus.

Worshipping here below, this is our third of three Stewardship sermons on **New Life Living in the Lord**. The Holy Spirit has been teaching us through Paul to guard God's peace by conduct. Today He wants us to **Grow up in Christ – By doctrine** – faithful, true and bold. First, let us be busy...

✎ **...preparing God's ministry of gifts.** (vv.7,11-13)

Verse seven reminds me of something strange about the Wisconsin Synod. It's not so much the budget as the results that puzzle me. On the one hand, we spend millions on our unique three-tiered system for ministerial training: preparatory schools + college of ministry + seminary. Millions more support twenty-four area Lutheran high schools like St. Croix and West in the Twin Cities, plus major congregational spending for Sunday School, youth and adults. The WELS supports Christian education. But here's the strange part. God's people still tell their pastors: "I can't witness. I don't know what to say." Is that why Paul wrote in his Captivity Letter to Philemon (v.6)? ***"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."***

If I walked through this assembly right now and paired you up with a stranger, would you be nervous? Could you share a simple message of law and Gospel? If not, is God to blame? Not at all. ***"To each of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it."*** Each Christian has at least one grace-gift from God. Most of you have many more. If you are not using them, don't blame God for lack of gifts for training. ***"It was he 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 for works of service, 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."***

We have not yet reached ***"the fullness of Christ."*** If we had, we would not need a fellow member's warning to avoid careless comments about a new member's past. We're all still learning. Filled up with Christ's communication, simple things like who orders cleaning supplies would also come clear. With ***the fullness of Christ***-like love and knowledge, we would not need someone to ask us for help. We would keep volunteering. In ***"the fullness of Christ"*** our Elders and Church Family leaders would not rest until they were sure new members knew their mailboxes, group members and opportunities to serve. We're still falling short ***"of the fullness of Christ"*** even though our pastor keeps encouraging us to read our Bible faithfully or listen on CD. Do you accept God's gifts of ***"pastors and teachers"*** by letting them prepare you for works of service? Or find some flaw in them to excuse yourself?

If you think you've learned enough, you may very well be full, but it's not with Christ. He literally ***"emptied Himself"*** of His full use of divine power and majesty in order to suffer as our Savior

from sin. Jesus cannot fill you with Himself until He empties you of your self. ***“To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”*** (Isaiah 66:2 KJV) Trembling, you know how desperately sinful it is to be prideful in God’s presence. To act as if you know enough to stand full height next to God. To think you have faith enough and precise knowledge to settle for a few minutes of a sermon now and then. This is as foolish as a combat soldier going to battle in swim suit and flip flops. How will you rescue others drowning in this slough of sin if you can’t swim yourself or if you’re spiritually out of shape? I asked Professor Habeck what he would tell someone who said, “You can get too much religion.” His answer: “True, but you are in no immediate danger.”

When I think how my own bad attitudes disgust my holy God, I’m so grateful for those famous verses in this letter to the Ephesians: ***“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*** (2:8-10 NIV) Yes, God gives us faithful pastors to help us **Grow up in Christ, preparing God’s ministry of gifts** with the gifts He has given us. We need to understand terms like Justification – Universal, Objective and Subjective – how they differ from Sanctification. We need to know how to properly distinguish between the two main doctrines of the Bible. Do you remember what they are? Can you tell whether a passage is Law or Gospel or both? If someone asks you about the “Thousand-Year Reign of Christ,” can you explain? Knowing for yourself is fine, but God has more in mind for Christians. Along with hearing and accepting the training offered by our pastors, God wants us...

 **...building each other up in love. (vv.14-16)**

You may think you’re way beyond this: ***“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.”*** But have you learned enough about the tricks of the trade among preachers to turn someone else away from lies and back to God’s truth? Could you watch a baby tossing on the waves and not try to save it? How can you let your friends or fellow church members be fooled by fine sounding books like *The Da Vinci Code* or the *Left Behind* series? Many are wondering now about real love in God’s sight and the true meaning of marriage. Why is homosexuality and divorce sin? What is God’s solution?

Even if you had reached the goal of perfect knowledge far beyond your pastor with all his training and study, far beyond your fellow members in Bible class, a cut above the best scholarship in our synod – you would only be fooling yourself about doing God’s will. He wants us busy **building each other up in love**. That means as Paul told Pastor Titus: ***“You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.”*** (Titus 2:1-5 NIV)

The body of Christ is healthy when each of us is busy with God’s gifts. That means if you want more young people involved in church, then pray for youth leaders or volunteer yourself. If you want the youth to think of this as their church, then talk to them, welcome them and encourage them to get busy **building each other up in love**. God has been so generous with His gifts. How can we look down on fellow members for their weaknesses or use false humility to excuse ourselves from serving? ***“Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”*** He was so conscientious about His responsibilities. Are we as earnest about making sure our area of ministry is excelling to the glory of God and the welfare of our congregation and community? None of us can do everything, but each of us has something to do for others. “Been there, done that – won’t do any more,” is not an attitude from God. In Christ the Head, ***“the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*** Christ’s church united, concerned and growing gives you a part in sharing God’s amazing grace. Amen.