

Where do I Fit?
The Apostolic Gift
 APEST – I
 July 30, 2017

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”

¹¹ So Christ himself gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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 people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:1-8, 11-16 (NIV)

A few months back we spent one Sunday just giving a quick overview of the five gifts found here in Ephesians 4:11, what some refer to as APEST – Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher. Over the course of the next five weeks we want to spend time on each of the gifts and try and help you discern where those gifts lie with you. I mentioned back on that Sunday when we first talked about them that Jesus possessed all five of those gifts perfectly. After all Jesus was (and still is) the image of the invisible God. If we humans are created in God’s image – then we also possess all five of those gifts at some level. Often they lie dormant. And the truth is that although we were made in God’s image we have all been marred by the fall and our own sinful nature, and I know this might come as a shock to you, but none of us are perfect like Jesus was.

But the moment that we repent of that sinfulness and put our faith in Jesus Christ as the only source of our salvation, then God sends the Holy Spirit into us and the gifts that he originally blessed us with begin to come out. Or, they should come out! Unfortunately, for many Christians they just continue to lie dormant.

Several years ago a Korean pastor was touring the United States, and after visiting many churches of various sizes and different denominations. His one comment when leaving was: “It’s amazing what you can accomplish without the Holy Spirit.” But just imagine what we could accomplish with the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit is so powerful we can’t even imagine completely.

Prior to his leaving this earth to sit on the throne at the right hand of God, the Father, Jesus promised to send us a helper who would come and change everything:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17 (ESV)

The reality that God lives within every Christ follower should overwhelm us. It is a truth that no human can fully grasp. Paul tells us in the beginning of Ephesians that the Holy Spirit is given to believers as a promise, a pledge of our salvation – not by us but by God the Father and Jesus the Son:

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of those who are God's possession –to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:13B-14

Neil Cole, in his book, *Primal Fire, Reigniting the Church with the Five Gifts of Jesus*, offers this very challenging observation after studying the work of the Holy Spirit as described in the Bible: “Everything necessary to live a godly life full of fruitfulness, power, and Christ’s presence dwells within every man, woman, and child who is in Christ.”

Why doesn’t that happen very often? Well, the truth is we can be indwelt with the Holy Spirit but not filled with the Holy Spirit, and we can be filled with the Holy Spirit but keep Him or Her to ourselves. As Christians, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit dwells in us but he was not meant to stay there. She is supposed to come out through us. And the church is to blame as well. Over the years the church has not done a very good job of drawing the Holy Spirit out of people, especially when it comes to those five gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11 – Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher.

We have mostly focused on two – Teacher & Shepherd, and even then we have kept them only to a certain number of people in certain positions. Some churches have focused a little on the Evangelistic Gift, while almost all have disregarded the Apostle and the Prophet. We do so by saying things like, “oh, those were gifts from the past, they don’t apply anymore.” But nowhere in the Bible does it say that. In fact the Bible says the exact opposite of that. Paul says in our passage this morning that Jesus gave, “some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and some to be teachers.”

There are several passages in the New Testament that speak about gifts for the church: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, 1 Peter 4 and Ephesians 4. Over the years, most have taught that God has given each of us one or even several of the gifts listed in those passages. But those passages need to be taken in their context. Many today believe that the Ephesians 4 passage is unique. Those five callings – Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher are the primary callings that Jesus gives to believers and the others are listings of jobs or positions to be filled which may, or may not, function within our calling. Those listings in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and 1 Peter 4 were never meant to be exclusive. They represent different jobs or positions that were filled as those specific times. The ideal is for us to be serving in the different roles and positions out of our primary ministry calling most of the time. Then the church is functioning more like the church Jesus has called us to be.

When it comes to the fivefold ministry calling each of us has been given one of those to be our primary calling. ***But to each one** grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. It was **he** who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.*

Another problem that has developed over the years is that the traditional teaching on this passage from Ephesians 4 is that the fivefold ministries are five leadership roles in the church. But again, that is not what the verse says. “To each one” refers to every member of the church, not just leaders. What the verse says is that each one of us has received a portion of grace in one of five roles. That grace has come to us in the form of a call to be one of five types of people. There is no mention of leadership in this passage. It is not just for those who hold certain positions, or those who have been ordained, or those who have gone to seminary. The fivefold ministries, or the fivefold callings, in Ephesians 4 is for each of us.

The church is functioning at its best when there is a mixture of all five of ministries, many different people functioning out or their primary calling in each of those areas.

I had breakfast this past week with a couple of men who have spent quite a bit of time studying about this APEST passage and the fivefold ministry calling. The two shared a couple different analogies that might be helpful:

One is that of a basketball team.

If you took two basketball teams with roughly the same talent level and the one time had all guards, while the other team had a point guard, a swing man, a power forward, a shooting forward, and a center – which of the two teams do you think would win? The team made up of five people with different callings will probably win every time.

The other analogy was that of a family of five or five people going on a trip together in the same car:

- The apostle is the one with his or her foot on the accelerator. He or she knows where they want to go and wants to get there as quick as possible.
- The prophet is the one on the brake. “Wooo, wait a minute here. Lets take a look at the map and make sure we are on the right course.
- The shepherd – he just wants to make sure everyone in the car is okay. Do you want something to eat or drink? Do we need to stop so you can go to the bathroom?
- The teacher – well she wants to stop along the way and see all the sights. Especially the historical ones so she can learn about them, show others and teach about them.
- The evangelist – he or she wants to pick up the shabby hitchhiker along the side of the road.

I like the car analogy because it seems to fit the church better, because you know that not everyone in the car is going to be getting along. When that person needs to go to the bathroom, the apostle isn't going to want to stop. He or she isn't going to want to stop when the prophet tries to put on the brake or the teacher wants to stop and learn more, and the apostle was driving

so fast he didn't see the hitchhiker and ran him over. If they were all shepherds and teachers the car would be probably be parked and going nowhere. Or possibly in circles around town and once in a while they would stop at the library.

If they were all shepherds there wouldn't be anybody to shepherd because shepherds aren't very good at allowing other people to take care of them. If they were all prophets there's a pretty good chance that they might all kill each other. And, let's face it, other than the evangelist, no one wants to pick up the shabby hitchhiker who looks like nobody else in the car.

That really is the perfect analogy of what Jesus wants His church to look like. People with the five different ministry callings and always ready to bring the one who is lost, the one who doesn't seem to fit with the rest, into the fold. Being the church is messy. The only way the church can become the church that Jesus wants us to become is that we recognize that He created us differently, with different callings and different personality styles, so we can all come together and more fully become the body He created us to be.

This morning we want to focus on what is probably the least used gift – The Apostolic Gift. Yet, the term *apostle* is mentioned almost eighty times in the New Testament. The word *pastor*, once! Interestingly Paul's letter to Timothy and Titus are often referred to as "pastoral epistles" while Paul, Timothy, and Titus all functioned in more apostolic roles. Paul refers to himself over and over again as an "apostle of Jesus Christ."

Apostles are "the sent ones." They are sent out by God with a specific task, to build up the Kingdom of God, the Body of Christ. Mature apostles are those who are mature enough to equip others to do the same.

Whereas shepherds and teachers can often stay in one ministry, one church, for a long time, apostles usually move around. Since they are the sent ones and they often need to be on the go, they get antsy pretty quickly. They often feel called to a specific group of people. Peter was an apostle to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-10). Today it might be experienced as a calling to a group of people like those who are disenfranchised, or to the divorced, or those addicted to drugs, or those from broken homes, to single mothers, etc.

Apostles are the pioneers, they like to take risks, they are uncomfortable with the status quo. They are the entrepreneurs, going out into the community, interacting with many. Christian apostles are often looking for new places and new people to advance Christianity and spread God's kingdom here on earth. They are church planters and missionaries. Jesus referred to his original twelve as apostles saying that they were the foundation on which He was going to build His church (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus himself was the ultimate apostle. He was sent from God with a clear purpose on earth. When he was about 30 years old he set out to fulfill what God had sent Him to do. Jesus knew that God's mission would lead Him to and through the cross. After his death and resurrection, just before his ascension into heaven, he says to his original apostles, as recorded in the Gospel of John, "as the Father sent me, I am sending you."

Our former Lead Pastor, Larry Augsburger was an apostle. He saw the vision that God had given Him for building the church and He set forth on carrying out the vision. On our current elder team, Alex is more of the apostle than the rest of us. It is balanced well by the shepherd and the teacher in him.

Benefits of apostles:

- They are the ones who take us outside of our comfort zone
- They are the ones who push us to carry out God's Great Commission – Go!
- They enjoy taking risks, even if they might sometimes fail
- They focus on a viable future for expanding the mission
- They are focused on moving forward – moving being important
- They are always trying to envision a new or better way of doing something
- They feel discontent when things stay the same for too long

Why do we need apostles in the church? Because if we didn't have apostles we would all circle the wagons. We would all get very comfortable and content with the way things are. This past week I was talking with someone who was sharing how his congregation has been really struggling over the past several years and that the only ones that are left are mostly older people. When I asked him what it might look like for the future he replied, "I think we're just comfortable being who we are, we've done our time." I felt a great sadness, because you know what their future is? Downhill! And then I thought, it doesn't have to be a congregation of older people, you give just about any congregation the opportunity just to sit and be comfortable, most everybody will take it, especially in our busy culture today.

That is the majority of our human natures. The problem with that is that is not God's call on our lives. God's primary call on our lives is to Go! To go out! To preach the Good News! To share the Gospel! To expand the Kingdom of God! To make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to follow Jesus. If we're not doing that as a church, no matter what size we are, we might as well close our doors.

We need apostles to get us out of our comfort zone, to challenge us to go out, to be the ones who lead us, to take risks even when they might fail, to question the status quo. Just being honest here, as one who is not an apostle, I say that with some fear and trepidation 😊

Drawbacks (the shadow side) of apostles

- They are often demanding and insensitive to other people
- They get discouraged easily by how slow the organization is moving
- They don't do very good on committee's
- Not only do they feel discomfort when things are moving slow, apostles often create discomfort in other people.
- Some apostles have the big vision – where they want us to go, but aren't so good at working out the details, creating frustration as well.

We need to remember that no gift is good by itself. They all have positives and they all have negatives. Balance is what is most important. Apostles are often balanced by prophets, who we will talk about next week, and shepherds.

The main Scriptural mantra for an apostle is probably from the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:12-14:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:12-14 (NIV)