

"THE VINE AND THE TRELLIS."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Texts for the Sermon: Ephesians 4:11-16

Introduction.

The Vine and The Trellis.

At our home in OKC by the front porch there was a trellis holding up a climbing rose bush. Over time it was less clear which was holding up which. From time to time I would prune and tend the rose bush and sometimes I had to tend to the trellis.

Let me ask you which was more important the rose or the trellis? Here's a trickier question. Which existed for the sake of the other? The trellis exists to help and support the vine, but the vine doesn't exist for the trellis.

Churches are a mix of trellises and vines, and it's vital to the health of a church to know which is more important. The fundamental work of the church is to spread and make known the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's the vine that we plant, fertilize, tend, water and nurture and from which we start other starter shoots. This Christian ministry needs some support and structure, some undergirding, management, finances, infrastructure, leadership and governance. We need good trellises to help grow health vines. But always our focus is on growing the vine.

In any organization including churches a problem starts when the trellis takes over the vine or trellis work becomes more important or more the focus of attention. Problems develop when more and more people put more and more time into the trellis and leave the vine work to just a few. To use an old phrase, when the tail starts to wag the dog things are out of balance.

In many ways trellis work is easier. Vine work, ministry work is harder, more personal, requiring us to step out of our comfort zones. But the goal of churches is to grow the vine and not the trellis. The trellis is important, but trellises don't grow vines, the real work is the vine. The goal of the church is to make and grow disciples of Jesus. Let's look more closely at a text that gives us a vision for the goal of the church.

Ephesians 4:11-16.

The church is the precious bride of Christ, the body of Christ which He purchased and redeemed with His own blood. He loves His church and does everything for His church.

One of the most beautiful descriptions of this is found in Ephesians 5.

Ephesians 5:25-27 ... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

This text goes on to say Christ nourishes and cherishes the church (Ephesians 5:29).

One of the demonstrations of Christ's love for His church is how He has sent many gifts to His church for her well-being.

Ephesians 4:7 Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

I Corinthians 12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

In Ephesians 4:11 Paul lists several of these gifts in the form of persons, apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds/pastors and teachers.

These gifts all focused on the work of ministry and particularly on the ministry of the word. This is important to help us understand what the goal of the church on earth is. These gifts are given by Christ to His Church to help her do the work He has created her to do.

What is the purpose of these gifts?

To bless the church? To meet the spiritual needs of the people? To do the work of the church? To make people feel better?

Notice how careful Paul states this. He doesn't say pastors are supposed to equip the saints (comma), and do the work of ministry (comma), and build up the body of Christ (period). Scripture doesn't teach that the work of ministry belongs only to the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

It says they are to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ. There is no clergy/lay division in the NT.

This is one of the abuses in the Catholic Church that the Protestant Reformation took on many years ago. There is not this huge gap between the clergy and the rest of the saints. There is one Head and all the rest are part of one body. All work done unto God and for His glory is holy work.

It's a bit ironic to observe in Dutch Reformed circles how when it comes to the pastor they still put him on a high pedestal and expect him to be very different and to do all the ministry. I appreciate the respect and honor, it's God honoring to honor His servants. But we go too far with it when we think that pastors are the only ones called to do ministry.

The role of the pastor is not the only one to do ministry, his ministry is to equip God's people for the work of service. Pastors are to train the saints for ministry. Every saint is given a gift by the grace of Christ for the purpose of ministry.

The word "ministry" is used not describe a pastors job description, but to describe the job description of all the saints, no exceptions.

Some churches go so far as to list on their bulletins the pastor and his name and then they put ministers and they add, "every member" or "the entire congregation."

The pastor doesn't have or hold on to all the power, his role is to empower the people, to give away the power. The pastor is never to monopolize the ministry, but to multiply the ministry.

The model for ministry is not a pyramid with the pastor at the top and then the staff or elders.
The model for ministry is not a bus with the pastor driving and everyone else along for the ride.

The model for ministry in the NT is a body, with each and every member having a distinctive role to play and every role is important and necessary. The pastor is one important part, but so is each and every other part.

The pastor's role is to equip all the saints for works of ministry so that the entire body is built up and encouraged and edified as every member uses their God-given gifts to glorify God and bless and benefit each other.

I am making *two bold claims* from this text. That ministry is every members work and the work of the ministry is the ministry of the word.

Let me defend these claims briefly from the text.

Every Christian is a vine worker, and vine work is the ministry of the word.

Our text says the saints are to be equipped for ministry for building up the body of Christ, so that (purpose statement) we all attain to the unity of the faith, so that we all may no longer children, so that we all grow up in Christ, so that the whole body with each part working together may grow and be built up in love.

All through the NT we see again and again that all the Christians were disciples making disciples and were servants of Jesus serving Jesus and His church.

Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Hebrews 3:12-13 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

We are all salt and light. We are all partners in ministry. When Paul names people in his letters he calls them fellow workers and partners in ministry.

Philippians 4:2-3 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Vine work is the ministry of the word.

Every member's ministry is vine work and vine work is the ministry of the word. We are to help each other and work together to attain the knowledge of the Son of God and that comes through the Word.

We are no longer to be like children tossed about by waves and winds of false doctrine and human cunning and deceitful schemes and that comes through knowledge of the Word.

Rather we are all to *speak the truth in love*, and that truth is the truth about God and the truth about Jesus and the truth about sin and the truth about grace. That's vine work.

Application and conclusion.

Let me shift now to application and show ministry work first individually and then corporately.

Each of us is called to and gifted by the Holy Spirit but each of us is different and so our ministries will be different. Each of us is in a different time of life and in a different sphere of influence so there will be differences on when and where and how we might minister.

What would it look like if each one of us was a speaker of God's truth in love into the lives of others? Let me give several possible examples (borrowed and adapted from a list in Colin Marshall, *The Trellis and The Vine*, p. 54-55).

At work on Monday Tom asks Peter what he did over the weekend and Peter thinks quickly he could mention the fishing trip on Saturday but decides instead to mention the sermon he heard on Sunday and how it helped him understand the problems in our world. He just says that much and Tom asks him for more detail so Peter explains how sin affects us and our world and how God judges it and gives a way out. Peter then makes it a point to pray regularly that Tom's heart will be softened to the truth in love.

Susie's teenage son is really struggling in high school and one evening she is able to assure him that God is bigger and stronger than his problems and more faithful than his friends and she has an opportunity to pray with him.

Richard meets every two weeks for breakfast with his friend Nate who is a young Christian. They are slowly reading through the gospel of John and talking about it and the basic issues of the Christian life.

Alison is worried about her friend Gloria who struggles with anxiety and has been missing church lately. Alison writes Gloria a letter, offering encouragement, quoting a few helpful Bible verses, basically speaking the truth in a loving way that she can receive, and offers to get together to pray.

Warren goes to a Bible study with several other people. He makes sure he reads the passage and gives it some good thought and prays asking God to use him at the study and to let his contribution be a blessing to someone else, that he might speak the truth in love.

Eileen is quite elderly and has difficulty getting out, but she phones her friend Jean every three days. They talk about what they read in their devotions and they even pray over the phone.

Trevor devotes an evening a week to a ministry to young boys in his church. He has been doing it for years and it has had a real impact on many young lives.

Cindy runs into a mom in the Safeway parking lot and after a few minutes of conversation finds out that things are hard at home. The mom asks for prayer and rather than just say she will do that, Cindy asks if they can pray right there and they do.

Sam's friend Jack is always saying negative things about himself and his life. Sam boldly tells him these things are lies from Satan. Satan is the accuser of the brethren. Sam speaks truth from Scripture about who God is and who Jack is in Christ.

One person speaks the truth in love through cards, another uses e-mail or Facebook. Yet another is intentional in conversations to speak of evidences of God's grace and goodness in the past week or two. Everyone is doing vine work, the work of ministry, of the Word, building up the body in love.

What does the work of ministry look like on a *corporate level*, in the life of the church? It happens when we have a ministry mindset, when we think in terms of ministry and see our service as ministry, a vine work, from the smallest to the biggest.

Our council has made a decision recently to take a step in this direction by making a change. It's a small change, but they hope a change that will lead to bigger things. They have decided to change the names of our committees from committees to *ministry teams*.

So our Missions in Action committee will become our Missions Ministry Team and our Fellowship Committee will be our Fellowship Ministry Team.

The council's not naïve, they know that a rose by any other name is still a rose. If a committee thinks and acts and feels like a committee it doesn't matter what you call it. The hope is that where the term committee can sound like meetings or boring church work that the term *ministry team* will help us re-think and re-vision our service as real ministry in the name of Jesus. That our work will be to speak and show and live the truth in love; that our labors will be about building up the body of Christ and prompting unity and growing in love for Christ and each other.

Ministry teams speaks both of what our real work is, *ministry*, and how we will do it, *together, in teams*, each joint and ligament and organ working together as the body is built up and grows in love.

If the only thing that changes is the name, then it will be meaningless. But if our attitudes and actions change as a reflection of the name then we will be on to something good for the glory of God. Each of our current ministry teams is asked to spend some time reflecting on how their work is ministry and refocusing their service in terms of ministry

Another possibility this opens up is more ministry teams. We can quickly feel like a church has too many committees. And then there is the pressure to try to get people to fill all the spots. But ministry teams form in a different way and for a different purpose. I see Helping Hands for Babies as a good example. A group of people with a heart for a particular type of ministry start getting together and doing it. Yes, they need to bring their idea or vision to the council and have

the councils blessing and oversight, but if the ministry is God-glorifying and Christ-exalting and Biblically grounded they will get an enthusiastic yes.

I encourage us to begin to think and act and pray with a ministry mindset and with an eye to what God is doing around us and what He has gifted and called us to do. May God give all of us vision for vine work as we actively and prayerfully seek ways to speak the truth in love for the glory of God and the sake of Christ and His Church.