

“Live – On Purpose”

Ephesians 4: 11-13

**First Presbyterian Church
July 12, 2020**

Over 50 years ago, scientist Spencer Silver was working at the company 3M on pressure-sensitive adhesives. These are glues that instantly bond to a surface but can be removed without destroying the surface. Silver experimented with various synthetic polymers and eventually found one that was a weak adhesive, but then he lost interest.

Twenty years later, a 3M engineer named Arthur Fry encountered a problem, but not at the company. This was a church problem. He and his fellow choir members would mark their hymnals with pieces of paper only to have them constantly falling out of the pages.

And that’s when Fry remembered the weak adhesive that had been shelved at 3M. He began using it to mark his hymnal with slips of paper that stayed put but could easily be removed. And, voilà, the Post-it note was born!

I tell this story because, like Spencer Silver and Arthur Fry, the Apostle Paul also had a problem to solve – how to keep church members engaged and connected to one another despite how easy it is to fall out of your engagement with church. Paul needed a way to bind us together despite all our different needs and desires.

The church in Ephesus arose amid the diverse backgrounds found in Asia Minor – differences in race, ethnicity, wealth, social position, and religious upbringing, differences we see here in this church. Paul knew that despite the differences among people, we all share a common calling, a calling to use our various gifts and talents to build up the body of Christ, which is the church. “The gifts (Christ) gave,” says Paul, “were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry,…”

His point is we each have a gift to be used in bringing people into the family of faith, where everyone has a role in the ministry of the church, and yes, that means all of us here and all our members and friends online and everyone who comes to know and Jesus; we all have a role in ministry.

Let’s look at the different roles Paul mentions and see if anyone here can relate to one or more of them. The word “Apostles” means “person sent.” In terms of our Christian faith, it means those called by Jesus for a particular role.

How many of you here or online know that Jesus has called you to fulfill a special role here on earth? Raise your hand or comment on YouTube if you sense that you just might have some God-given gifts and talents. We all do, right? Most everyone has some sense that they have a specific role in the work of Jesus, even if we don't know what that is all the time. For instance, you would think that the Pope would know what his role is in the body of Christ.

And yet, the story goes that when Pope John Paul II got to heaven, Saint Peter met him and said, "Frankly, you're lucky to be here." The pope asked, "Why, what did I do wrong on earth?" Saint Peter answered, "God is very angry about your stance against women in the priesthood." "God is mad about *that*?" asked the pope. "Yes," said Saint Peter. "She's furious." See how easy it is to lose sight of your true role and purpose, when we focus on our differences instead of our common calling?

As we look at how to "Live - On Purpose" in this, the last in our sermon series, let's look at all the roles Paul mentions. In addition to apostles – those who are sent, which is all of us – Paul mentions prophets.

Prophets are not so much people who can foresee the future, but rather, these are people who have a firm grasp on the present, people who can tell what's coming from experience, prayer, and wise discernment.

Some people have this gift, and some do not. If you can tell what's likely to happen given a set of complicated and emotionally-charged circumstances, you have the gift of prophesy. And you are called to use it in leadership – in your family, in your workplace, school or neighborhood, and here at church.

If that's you, consider how God is calling you to help lead and direct his beloved children in the ways of Christ, no matter where you find yourself in any situation. And if you truly sense that you're called to help lead others (maybe even if you're not sure or you don't like it; but you sense it), and if you've not been asked to step into a leadership role, let me know, or let someone at your workplace or school or wherever know. The world needs people who can lead with wisdom and discernment. Perhaps that's why God put you here.

The next role Paul mentions is evangelist. Evangelists are those who share the good news; they tell people about things that are truly remarkable and worthy of sharing. The word evangelist literally means "bringer of good news, in the original Greek.

A Christian evangelist shares the good news of Jesus Christ. They live their lives based on the love of God, the word of Christ, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. And in all of it, they just can't help but reflect this to others, both in word and deed.

People they meet know they've met someone special, and often, their interest is piqued and they find themselves asking how can I get some of what she's got, what he's got, that bright spirit and confidence in the Lord. I know we have many evangelists here at church, many living-breathing expressions of the Good News of Jesus Christ. In fact, we should all be evangelists in this way. We should all be drawing people to deepen their knowledge and love of God. And a great way to do that is to invite someone to come along side this family of faith, either online, here in the Sanctuary, or outside at Westminster Hall for a little food and fellowship Wednesday evening.

I know "in-person" is scary right now and I'm not pushing anyone to be here at West Hall this Wednesday. But for those who can gather safely and are doing so at restaurants and elsewhere, there's nothing wrong with inviting them to the events and gatherings of your church, which truly is keeping everyone's health and safety in mind.

Finally, Paul mentions pastors and teachers, those who provide instruction, guidance and comfort. We all have a bit of pastor and teacher in us. We all can help someone learn something about Jesus, guide folks in going a little deeper in their faith, comfort those who are struggling in this world. That's just as important as any of the roles Paul mentions.

Paul lifts up each of these roles as critical in building up the body of Christ and furthering the kingdom of God. Each of these roles has a place, as Paul says, in equipping "the saints for the work of ministry." In fact, the work of ministry is the place for us to discover, develop and share these gifts with one another. That is why Paul made it a point to mention these different roles, because by knowing, embracing and stepping into these roles, we come to know and embrace Jesus – and each other – more and more.

These are the gifts of the Lord, after all – the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher in each of us. And gifts are meant to be enjoyed, used and shared – in this case, as we do the work of ministry.

Here at First Church we live into our calling as followers of Jesus by gathering for worship and fellowship, caring for one another in Christlike fashion, giving to the needs of others through our pledges and the church's mission and assistance giving, and growing in our knowledge and love of God through Christian Education and our small-groups.

This is how we honor our God-given purpose, a purpose that is bigger than ourselves, that overcomes our doubts and fears, a purpose that shines light where there is darkness, breaths hope into despair, and gives guidance to those who are lost.

However it is that you approach your divine purpose as a follower of Christ, do so with our mutual calling in mind, to strengthen the body of Christ through your active and faithful participation – as

an apostle sent by Jesus, an evangelists with good news to share, a prophet who knows what's what, and a pastor or teacher who inspires others while comforting and equipping God's people. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Creator God, parent of us all, we give you thanks for all the things you have given us that make our lives full: our family, our friends and our church.

We pray today for those who do not share our joy. We pray for those who don't know what it's like to have brothers and sisters in faith who in tough times love us and pray for us.

Please, Lord, send your Spirit of upon all who grieve their losses, whether of loved ones, mobility or health. Send your Spirit of healing and wellness upon all those dealing with illness and disease, and especially the folks we've been keeping in prayer these recent months.

And for us, Lord, help us to share in this great cloud of witnesses that you have gathered together, not based on the color of our skin, the possessions that we have, whether we are working or retired or looking for work, or anything else about our place in this world.

Help us, Father God, to remember that we are all your children, brothers and sisters in Christ, and equip us, strengthen us and inspire us to reach out to others in love and service that reflects your grace and mercy and the glory of your divine light.

We ask all this in the name of he who is the light of the world, Jesus, the Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;**

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen