

# The Church is a place of opportunity

Message for Sunday, February 19, 2017  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Matthew 10:1-8

## Children's Message:

Philippians 1:3–5, New International Version:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

What is a “partner”? *Listen to answers.* Basically it’s someone you work with. What makes for a good partner? *Possible answers: cooperation, encouraging, helpful, caring, loyal, enthusiastic, etc.* Question: Are you a good partner?

This Bible passage talks about being partners in the gospel. One of the most amazing things is that God chooses you and me to be partners with him! We can work together on the same team doing God’s work!

**Message** “The Church is a place of opportunity”

## 1) The power of empowerment

Jane and I have a real love for the outdoors<sup>1</sup>, and we tried to pass that on to our children. When they were young, we went for walks in the woods, and tried to identify the tracks we see in the snow or mud. In the wintertime, I piled the snow—maybe you’ve forgotten what snow is like. It’s the fluffy white crystals which fall from the sky in the months from December to March. We used to get lots of that here in Canada years ago—anyway, I piled the snow from our driveway into a huge snow mound in our yard. Then we dug out a cave inside the mound. Cheryl, Christine and I slept in the snow cave a few times. One time it was -20° C, but the insulation of the snow helped us to stay warm and cozy inside our sleeping bags.

I don’t know about Jane, but I remember where I got my love for the outdoors. It was a man named

Roger Mackin. He was the leader for the scout troop I belonged to in Moose Jaw. I enjoyed the Friday night meetings well enough, but I *lived* for the weekends when we went on hikes and camps. In Cubs I had learned how to build a fire; Scouter Roger taught me how to make a fire using logs that were soaking wet from a rainstorm.

It was he that severely reprimanded me for cutting down a live tree by mistake, then told me to cut it up for firewood anyway, so it wouldn’t go to waste. One day a friend and I broke into the Scout Hall in order to play with the sports equipment. It was Scouter Roger who caught us red-handed, made us clean up everything and mop the floor besides, and never spoke another word of the incident. One afternoon he took me for a ride in his airplane, flew out over the provincial park nearby and asked *me* to plot the route for our next hike.

As I look back now, I can see that he was doing more than teaching about the outdoors. He was teaching responsibility, character, and leadership. He helped me to grow and to develop my potential. He empowered me.

You probably have similar memories of people and conversations that have had an impact on your life. It may have been a coach, a teacher, a minister, a neighbour, or, of course, a parent. Those are precious memories.

You could say that these people empower us. Author and preacher Daniel Lupton says that “*Empowerment is seeing what God sees in a person and helping it to blossom.*”<sup>2</sup> It’s something that everyone needs in life, and what better place is there to look for it than among God’s people? Certainly God empowers people. So my conviction is that the church will also be this way.

By the way, empowerment is not something that happens just to children. Whether it’s the six year old, the tenth grader, the young adult, the 40 year old, the retired person, or the senior, some of the most encouraging words to hear are, “I see great potential in you!” That’s what happens when we see others through God’s eyes.

<sup>1</sup> For instance, our idea of a honeymoon was to spend a week backpacking through the wilderness of southwestern Newfoundland.

<sup>2</sup> In his book *I Like Church, But...*, p. 79.

## 2) The church empowers people

In this series of messages, we're looking at the mission statement for St. Paul's Church. Here is how Part 2 reads:

**ST. PAUL'S MISSION STATEMENT, part 2**  
**We are challenged to create nurturing spaces for worship, fellowship, and education for people of all ages.**

There are different ways to understand exactly what that means. What grabbed my attention was the idea that the life and work of church is for people of all ages. We all have different needs, and we all have different gifts and abilities. The point is, whoever you are, there is a place for you in the St. Paul's Church family.

I'll come back to this in a few minutes. But first, let's look at how Jesus empowers people.

## 3) Jesus empowers people

The most astounding example of Jesus empowering others is when he turned the disciples loose to do his work.

**Matthew 10:1-8, Today's English Version:**  
 Jesus called his twelve disciples together, and gave them authority to drive out the evil spirits and to heal every disease and every sickness. ... [verses 2-4 lists their names]. Jesus sent these twelve men out with the following instructions: "Do not go to any Gentile territory or any Samaritan towns. Go, instead to the lost sheep of the people of Israel. Go and preach, 'The Kingdom of heaven is near!' Heal the sick, raise the dead, make the lepers clean, drive out demons."

Wow! Jesus took an amazing risk, giving his authority to these twelve. Many times in the Gospels, they look like a bunch of idiots on a TV comedy show, but it's for real! And he's trusting *them* to do his work?!

In the United Church tradition, people are not ordained as ministers until they have finished a 3-4 year bachelor degree in university, spent another 3 years obtaining a Master's Degree at a recognized seminary, worked under supervision for a year, been checked out by a psychiatrist, and been interviewed by their home congregation, by the

Presbytery and by the Conference.<sup>3</sup> These disciples were sent out to do much the same work after having been with Jesus for just a few months!

Really, though, it wasn't as though they had been given no training at all. During those months, they had had an crash course in what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. They had been with him as he went around the country, observing him preaching and healing. And the rest of chapter 10 of Matthew's Gospel contains more instructions for them to follow.

As they went out on their mission, I wonder who was more nervous about this: the disciples or Jesus? But Jesus did it anyway, nerves or not. What an experience! What a way to build people up!

Jesus' plan from the beginning was to have the ministry pass from his hands to others. He would build the church by building people. He would fill them with himself, and then step out of the way. He didn't maintain control over every decision, but instead instilled his values, skills, goals and Spirit into his followers. And he built a church that even the forces of hell can't stand up against.

## 4) The church is a place of opportunity

Once upon a time there was once a woman who was disappointed, who was disillusioned, who was depressed. She wanted to live in a good world, a peaceful world, and she wanted to be a good person. But the news media showed her how far we were from such a reality. So she decided to go shopping. She went to the mall and wandered into a new store, where the person behind the counter looked strangely what she thought Jesus would look like. Gathering up her courage she went up to the counter and asked, "Are you Jesus?"

"Well, yes, I am," the man answered.

"Do you work here?"

"Actually," Jesus responded, "I own the store. You are free to wander up and down the aisles, see what it is I sell, and then make a list of what you want.

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<sup>3</sup> I'm not defending that system; just describing the way it is. I have my doubts about the need for all that academia.

When you are finished, come back here, and we'll see what we can do for you."

So the woman did just that. And what she saw thrilled her. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, peace in families, no more drugs, harmony, clean air. She wrote furiously and finally approached the counter, handing a long list to Jesus. He skimmed the paper, and then smiling at her said, "No problem." Reaching under the counter, he grabbed some packets and laid them out on the counter.

Confused, she asked, "What are these?"

Jesus replied: "These are seed packets. You see, this is a catalogue store."

Surprised the woman blurted out, "You mean I don't get the finished product?"

"No," Jesus gently responded. "This is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. Then you plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them to grow. Then everyone enjoys the results."

"Oh," she said, deeply disappointed in Jesus. Then she turned around and left the store without buying anything.

Let's go back to our mission statement:

**ST. PAUL'S MISSION STATEMENT, part 2**  
**We are challenged to create nurturing spaces for worship, fellowship, and education for people of all ages.**

I think the key word in that sentence is "We." Who has the responsibility for making this happen? "We" do. It's like the seeds that Jesus sells in that store. We have this vision for our church; it's up to all of us to make it happen.

The Church is a place of opportunity. The possibilities of how we might love and serve others are endless.

For the Next Steps, I'll just repeat what I've been saying the last few weeks: Pray for God to give you his love and wisdom. Share your ideas with other people. Get excited together. Then do it!

I don't think you need approval from Church Council to start doing something. Rather, the role of Council is to say, "God bless you! What resources do you need? How can we help make this dream a reality?"

### **Next Steps:**

- Pray. Ask God to fill you with his love, and grant you wisdom and inspiration.
- Share your ideas with others. Dream together. Make plans. Get excited.
- Do it.