Read also Deuteronomy 10:12-22

How do you define yourself? What is your personal model?

- A popular magazine?
- The type of music you listen to?
- What you do for a living?
- Your sport or club at school?
- Your church? Your Bible?

How do you define yourself?

Wait a minute; you might say . . . did you say CHURCH?

Yes I did.

For how many of you does church or the Bible form your primary identity?

Even if it did, it would probably not be something you would want to advertise. The church is not on the top of the popularity list. But this passage in Ephesians talks about the church, as if it is something really special.

It talks about the church as something organic and living.

It talks about the church as a place where you are nurtured and loved.

It talks about a place where we receive – and give.

It talks about the church as interlocked with Jesus.

If you mention the church in this culture, what do people usually say? (Let them answer . . . *judgmental; rules; institutional*) Who would want to go there?

And indeed, many people across this nation, particularly in the younger generation, have stopped going to church.

But here in Ephesians, when you hear the passage, it makes you want to RUN to the church because it is everything helpful for everyday life.

It begins with Christ, who lived and died and ascended to heaven, right? Then, at Pentecost; through the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to come down and give gifts to His people. Let's READ Eph. 4:11-13.

So, the gifts are you and you and you. Other passages add to the gifts mentioned here. For example, in Corinthians it says there are "gifts of power, of healing, of miracles, of prophecy, discernment of spirits," (1 Cor. 12:4-11) along with caring for one another.

But the gifts mentioned here have to do with teaching the Bible.

So you always want to ask questions when you read the Bible, and my question would be *why did the writer highlight the teachers?*

Well, the answer is in vs. 12 – to build up the church.

To build an institution? NO To build a building? NO

To build YOU up, make you strong; to form an identity of unity and knowledge of Christ.

When you go to church, you need to think of it as going to a restaurant, with a little bit of the gym thrown in. You are nourished by learning from the Bible and all that is done here. And, you contribute to others' nourishment.

This summer we have been talking about being a disciple through believing, belonging, and behaving.

- If I am hungry but never actually eat, I will not be nourished.
- I can believe in good health; belong to a gym; but if I do not actually go to the gym where I belong and practice what I believe, I will never be strong.

However, I will be shaped by what I do. If I do not read or study the Bible, I will be shaped by that magazine, or club, or by the company I keep.

Is the church and Jesus' Word shaping you? Or, something else? Let's read on. READ Eph 4:14-16

So the church helps us discern right and wrong. The teachers of the Bible help us not to be tricked by the lies of clever people. The church helps us to know Christ better, speak the truth in love, and follow His voice.

But how do you describe what happens? Perhaps a fairy tale will help us. This story is from *The Magician's Nephew*, by C. S. Lewis, The Narnia Series.

A boy named Digory lived with his uncle, who was a magician, because his mother was ill – and about to die. He was very adventurous and independent. Next door lived Polly, Digory's friend. The uncle was a deceitful fellow, more interested in his experiments than in others. He tricked Polly and sent her to another world. Digory realized he must be the one to go and bring her back.

And so he went and found her. Then he thought, why not have a little adventure before returning to earth? So off they went.

Well, he and Polly happened upon a castle, and in a room of the castle was a golden bell with a little golden hammer, and a note that said, *strike the bell and bide the danger or wonder, till it drives you mad, what would have followed if you had.* Polly wanted absolutely nothing to do with it, but Digory's independence kicked in. They argued. He finally shoved her aside and rang it.

It unleashed a witch, who desired to be queen. And that's how evil entered Narnia.

Perhaps you know the story of the creation of the kingdom of Aslan the Lion, who represented Christ. All the animals and the people came before Aslan and He said, "I give you yourselves. Treat each other gently and cherish one another." And Polly and Digory grew to love Aslan.

One day Digory wanted to speak to Him. He said, "Please –Sir," Could you please give me some magic fruit of this country to make Mother well?"

And Aslan with great shining tears in his eyes said, "My son, Let us be good to one another. But I have to think of hundreds of years of life in Narnia. I want to plant a tree that will protect Narnia from the evil one. You must get me the seed from which that tree is to grow. Pluck an apple from that tree and bring it back to me."

And so Digory set off with Polly; carried by a winged horse far away to a beautiful garden.

When they got there he came to some golden gates and written on them it said this:

Come in by the gold gates or not at all,
Take of my fruit for others or forbear,
For those who steal or those who climb my wall
Shall find their heart's desire and find despair.

It was not hard to spot the tree. Its apples shone. He picked one and put it in his pocket. Then a terrible hunger came over him and a longing to taste that fruit.

Could it be wrong to taste one? Should he not do what he wanted? Maybe the notice on the gate was just advice. Who cares about advice? He had already obeyed part of its message, "take one for others."

As he turned to leave, there was the witch. She said, "I know you are going to take that fruit back to the Lion; for *him* to eat, for *him* to use. You simpleton! That fruit is the apple of life. Eat it, boy, and you and I will both live forever and be king and queen. And, what about your mother? If she eats it, she will be healed. Why should you be the Lion's slave?"

The boy knew he was in a terrible dilemma.

The witch argued for quite some time, trying to persuade him to think for himself and disobey the Lion. But then she said something that tipped her hand; that let him see how cold and empty she was, "You needn't tell the little girl anything, or take her back with you."

He looked at Polly, his friend, whom he had gone to get when she was in trouble; who had forgiven him when he blocked her and rang the bell; who stayed with him through thick and thin. Was it only about him? Should the Lion be trusted?

He ran from the garden and jumping on the horse they flew away.

From the apple he gave to Aslan, a great tree sprung up. Aslan picked one and gave it to Digory, saying, “What I give you now will bring joy. It will not give endless life, but it will heal. Go, take this to your mother.”

And so he did, and in the days to come, she completely recovered. It was a miracle.

It is sometimes so hard to hear and stay true to the voice of Jesus Christ and not be deceived by other voices that would draw you away. The church nurtures you and me as we listen to the Word and use our gifts for one another. Then we are unified in the truth , and grow up to full maturity and strength; trusting the Lord Jesus Christ to meet your most heartfelt needs.

What shapes you? May your identity be shaped by the church, as we are unified in the Words of our Savior.

AMEN