

5G: Giftedness Sunday, 10/2/22

Last week, we were reminded that we grow in generous connection with God and God's people when we learn to give generously and cheerfully to God's Kingdom. God's provision has made us wealthy, and we're blessed when we share that wealth.

This week, we tackle our stewardship of the gifts God has given us to serve others. As each day unfolds before us, we are given the awesome responsibility of deciding how we will live each of the 24 hours, 1,440 minutes, and 86,400 seconds in the day. Some of that time is well invested in rest and recreation, some of it in caring for our families, and much of it in work. Those things are part of God's calling too, and we need to remember that there is sacred worth in the ordinary rhythms and tasks of daily life. But if we're honest with ourselves, we sometimes short-change ourselves and God by investing our time unwisely.

Of all the God-honoring ways that we can spend our time, there's one that's especially easy to neglect, and that's using our giftedness to serve people. Perhaps that's because we're usually so busy with our own lives that we simply don't see the people around us who need help. I genuinely believe, and have experienced myself, that serving others in very simple ways fills a hole in our heart that we often don't even realize needed filling. That can be especially true when, in the process, we discover that God has gifted us in special ways that allow us to serve with extra joy and effectiveness.

Sometimes we get confused by the various lists given in Scripture, and we either think that the only gifts that exist are the ones on the list, or that the only gifts that matter are things like prophecy, pastoring, and teaching. These lists are just prominent examples. They were never intended to be read like grocery lists. In fact, I believe the full list of God's gifts could be as long and as varied as the creative imagination of God. But one thing unites them all: they're all given by God, with a particular purpose.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way: "As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."¹ That "body," of course, is the Body of Christ, the Church, you and me together. And the purpose of the gifts is made very clear in the preceding verse: "We will speak the truth in love,

¹ Ephesians 4:16. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.”²

So, the gifts we’re talking about today are gifts given by God, in abundant variety, meant to be used together with other gifts given to other people, so that the Church- that is, you and me, together- will grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus in our attitudes and actions of love.

Another confusion we have over this matter of giftedness is that we assume we know our own giftedness, or lack thereof. In truth, there’s sometimes a difference between what you’ve been educated and trained to do for a living and how God has gifted you to serve in the church. Pastors are anomalies in that regard.

It’s true that if you have a head for math and experience with budgets, you might have something extra to add by serving on our Finance Team. But the gift that’s needed most might not be something so obvious. Perhaps your gift is the ability to listen well. Perhaps your gift is the ability to summarize a conversation well. Those gifts could be so helpful in any ministry, even the Finance Team.

And here’s the hard part. The only way to really know how you’ve been gifted for ministry is to try different ministries and see what happens. Candidates for ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church undergo a rigorous process over many years of practical ministry experiences accompanied with formal times of reflection and the feedback of peers. We don’t really have anything like that for the ministry of all believers, but the same principals apply. It’s in the acts of serving others in the name of Jesus that we discover how we’re gifted.

Do you experience joy and satisfaction in your service? Are you contributing to the ministry, no matter how small the contribution? That may not be obvious to you, so asking for feedback someone else involved with your ministry is often a helpful thing to do when you’re trying to discern whether a ministry is a good fit with your giftedness.

There are certainly times when we simply need to roll up our sleeves and do something out of love because we see that it needs to get done. Washing the dirty dishes or taking out the trash are great examples of that. If you have the spiritual gift of doing dishes,

² Ephesians 4:15. Ibid

talk to me- I'd like to build an addition for you at my place. Some things simply need to get done. But in the long haul, I believe the Body of Christ is served best when we're serving others in love, out of the giftedness we've been given through Christ.

Paul offers another perspective on giftedness in our second reading. I'm reading from 1Corinthians, chapter 12 in the Message paraphrase, beginning with verse 1. {Read 1Corinthians 12:1-11 MSG}

I love this paraphrase, especially verse 7, which really brings this idea of giftedness alive: "Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!"³ Notice that everyone is included in the giftedness and benefit. This isn't hyperbole. If you're drawing breath, you have a gift or gifts to build up the Body of Christ, whether you're using them or not. Notice also what happens when we discover and use those gifts in ministry. By a miracle of God's Spirit, we reveal who God is when we use those gifts in the loving service of others. Isn't that astonishing?

How you frame your experience of reality has so much impact on your perception of your life. Let's contrast two different perspectives on service. Here's the first one. As your pastor, I'm asking you to step up and shoulder your share of the work that has to be done to keep the lights on around here. I know that nobody really wants to sit through any more tedious zoom meetings, but someone has got to do it! Now, how appealing or life-giving was that perspective for you? Let's try a different approach.

As your pastor, I want you to experience the thrill of discovering who God made you to be, and how your God-given gifts can combine with others to make us a stronger, more joyful church that reveals the face of Jesus to everyone we meet. Do you see the difference? I don't know about you, but I'm signing up for the second one! I get goose bumps just thinking about the Holy Spirit possibilities!

With that in mind, I want to reintroduce you to something that may seem old and familiar to you: "Using My Gifts to Serve," or what has been called in years past, the "Time and Talent Survey." We didn't send one to you with your stewardship letter this year,

³ 1Corinthians 12:7. The Message (2002).

because I wanted a chance to talk with you about it first and invite you to see it in a new light. It's entirely up to you whether you're going to view using your gifts for your service from the first perspective I just described- shouldering your share of the work- or the second- discovering who God made you to be, and how your God-given gifts can combine with others to make us a stronger, more joyful church. As for me, I prefer investing my life in joyful community building rather than slogging through obligated drudgery. Don't you?

I know these forms are imperfect. We're not trying to put a box around you or God to say that you can't serve Christ in ways that aren't included on the checklist. But the forms do describe the general contours of our current ministries at BUMC, and so they're still worth using.

If you're finding meaning and joy in the ways you're currently serving, then I suggest you keep serving in the ways you're serving. If you find that you're ready to try something else, then you should go for it. Life is too short to toil without purpose or joy. If it's been a while since you've served in the church or community, now's the time to seize the day and embrace a new journey of joy. And if you just don't know how to begin, talk to me. Talk to Debbie. Talk to any of our leaders who have been serving in a variety of ways over the years.

You'll find these forms in the church lobby, but we also have a convenient online form that you can access on the front page of our church website. Just look for the 5G logo.

Most of the things we spend our time on have value to us- if they didn't, we wouldn't feel pulled in so many directions. Most of us have no trouble finding something worthwhile to do. On the other hand, all of us could use some help in discerning the best ways to use our time. Oftentimes the most important things, like serving others with the Body of Christ, get crowded out by the most immediate things, like the morning news program blaring on the TV, the dinner menu, or our social media feeds. This year, I invite you to reassess your schedules and imagine ways to make room for new ways to serve others in the name of Jesus. Don't do it because you feel you have to. Do it because you want to draw closer to God and God's people. Do it because when you use your giftedness from God to serve others, you're showing someone else, and reminding yourself, what Jesus looks like.

Please take some time now to reflect on how you will serve others with your God-given gifts.



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