

Sermon: Body Language: Wired to Serve
Text: I Corinthians 12:4-7 (1046)
Date: September 5, 2010
Location: Northwest Community Church

INTRODUCTION

Today we launch into the how to's of growing up. I've skipped ahead to this topic in our Fall theme of growing up so that it coincides with our Volunteer Fair that starts today. Next week, Pastor Bunny is going to start a condensed version of our Spiritual Gifts class to help those that want to take some evaluations and really learn how God can use them in our church and in our community. Three weeks from today, I am going to give you a chance to commit to discovering your gifts and putting them to use for God but you'll hear more about that later. Over this three week series, I will also be interviewing some of our wonderful volunteers so that you can hear examples of how they discovered their unique gifts and abilities and how they've found a place to use them in the body of Christ. Today, I want to invite Will Brown to come and join me.

1. What is your primary job?
2. Describe the area that you serve in here at Northwest
3. This position is a little different than what you do for the Air Force. Sometimes people serve the church using the same skills that they do for their employer. But, sometimes our members want to serve in different areas that they feel passionate about. That seems to be the case for you.
4. How does the work fit your gifts and abilities?
5. How does the work fit your passion and your personality?
6. You give a lot of time to Northwest. How do you view the time that you give?
7. What rewards do you receive for serving?
8. Can you imagine being a part of the body of Christ without serving?

I'm always amazed at an artist's ability to create things. I stand in the art galleries and get close and I can see the lines and the different shadings of a painting. On one level it looks so simple but I know if I tried to do it myself it would look like refrigerator art from a first grader.

One of those stunning masterpieces is Michaelangelo's statue of King David. He was working with a huge piece of marble – one that, for several reasons, had been abandoned by a number of other sculptors as being too difficult to work with. But from this unwieldy block, Michelangelo brought forth this remarkable statue of the young hero on the threshold of greatness. He said that David was already in there – perfect inside the marble slab - waiting to be freed. All that he needed to do was chip away what was not David.

I like to think of that as a wonderful description of what God wants to do in us. We have within each of us the potential to be used by God in ways we could never imagine. But that "better you" is hidden below layers of rock that need to be chipped away. Maybe it is insecurities that need to be chipped away. Maybe there is sin in your life that needs to be chipped away. Maybe there are distractions or a negative self image that need to be chipped away. Maybe it is pride that needs to be chipped away. Maybe it is just a lack of self-awareness that needs to be chipped away.

What I want to talk about in these few minutes is discovering the "you" that God created you to be. The you that has been uniquely gifted to accomplish the purposes of God. John writes in I John 3:2 that we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.

We Are All Ministers Equipped by God (verse 4-5)

The first thing you might be tempted to say is – well maybe God has overlooked me. I don't think there is anything special about me. There's no masterpiece under these layers of rock!

But look closely at our text. Allow me to read verse 4 in the paraphrase version called The Message.

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit.

Verse 4

We have all been given gifts by God. Those gifts are unique to you. No one else has the same combination of gifts and personality and passions that you do.

Now, I need to remind you that this letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church was a letter meant for the church. The first step in discovering the masterpiece that God has created you to be is to accept Christ as your Lord. But, that's not where it stops. We can be followers of Christ but if we haven't matured and grown, we can still not understand who God has called us to be.

Here's where Scripture helps us to see who we are IN CHRIST. In Christ we are no longer just Joe, or Bob or Sue. IN CHRIST, we are no longer just a plumber or an IT worker or a nurse or a teacher. When we come to Christ, whether you realize it or not, we take on another occupation.

Peter writes to the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor that

You have been chosen by God himself -- you are priests of the King... you are God's very own I Peter 2:9

In other words, you are a Minister. Can you say that with me. I AM A MINISTER and turn to the person next to you and say YOU ARE A MINISTER. All together now...WE ARE MINISTERS.

So where does that leave Pastors like myself? Here's what Paul says...

"(God) has given... pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of ministry, so the body of Christ may be built up." Eph. 4: 11-12

In other words, it is my job not to do all of the ministry...that would be a disservice to you. Rather, my job is to help you chip away at the layers of rock so you can discover the masterpiece inside of you. So that you can discover your gifts and abilities and how God can use you to accomplish his purposes.

We are Wired to Serve (verse 6)

 We must allow God to “activate” the gifts in us.

 *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:14*

 *No, don't say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to criticize God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who made it, "Why have you made me like this?" When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into? Romans 9:20-21*

This is one of the things that excites me about my job. When you walk into NWCC for the first time, I start sizing you up. I start imaging what could be under the layers of rock. What I have discovered is what the Psalmist captures so well in Psalm 139...*that you are fearfully and wonderfully made and God's handiwork is wonderful.* Though you might come to the body of Christ wounded and broken and beat down or maybe even arrogant and proud, under it all there is a person that is fearfully and wonderfully made by God. You are a person with a divine purpose.

But here's the distinction... I can only help you recognize and prepare for the work of ministry. But look what verse 4 says...

*There are different kinds of working, but the same God **works** all of them in all men.*

Let's look at that phrase “God works.” It can be translated different ways. The greek word has the sense that God does something supernatural to give us our unique gifts. The NRSV says God activates you to do his work. I'm going to put all of that together and say that “God supernaturally activates the gifts he has placed in you.” In other words, God reaches down and turns your gifts on.

What we have to believe is that we are all wired to serve. We all have unique gifts, abilities, personality that God wants to activate. You heard Will describe today how God activated the gifts in him. Next week you'll hear someone else share a wonderful story of how her gifts were activated.

Serving with our Gifts is an Outward Sign of an Inward Change (verse 7)

 *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 5:16*

I want to point out just briefly a phrase that is used in verse 7. There, Paul refers to our use of gifts as “a manifestation of the Spirit.” Our gifts are an outward sign of an inward change. When we use our gifts it is a way to show the world how God is at work in us.

James makes it clear in James 2 that our works don't save us, but he concludes that doing good works is a natural overflow of our faith. He goes so far as to say that a faith that does not produce good works is a dead faith.

I am convinced that words mean very little in our society any more. We can say all day that we love someone or that we care or that we want to help, but it really doesn't mean anything until we put it into action. If you want to impact your family, your workplace and your community then let God activate your gifts and start serving others. Put love into action and you will see results.

Our Gifts are Meant to Serve Others (verse 7)

 *"God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God's many kinds of blessing." 1 Peter 4:10 (LB)*

Let me share one final thought with you out of this passage. You see there is a strong temptation to think that our unique gifts and abilities somehow make us more special than others. It's human nature isn't it. Remember when you were a kid and you're opening presents at Christmas and you have like this instant radar that is able to open presents and process every present being opened by your siblings or cousins around the room. You know if someone got a better gift than you. You also know if your gift is more awesome than everyone else's.

Kids aren't the only ones that compare gifts. In our text today if you read on for a while you will see that members of the Corinthian church were comparing gifts. The problem seemed to center around the gift of tongues which was being abused. People were bragging about how well they spoke in tongues and how often they did it. They were using their gifts to make themselves look good. Here's a good rule of thumb for all of us no matter what your gift is. Does the use of your gift draw attention to yourself or to God? If it draws the attention to yourself that means people are focusing on you instead of on God.

The second rule of thumb is found in verse 7 when Paul writes that our gifts are given for the common good. In other words, your gifts aren't about you. In I Corinthians 14:26, Paul writes that all of our gifts must be done not to make ourselves look good but for the strengthening of the church.

Frederick Buechner says: "The place where God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

We are going to get into this in more detail but let me paint a picture for you. Imagine a great big puzzle with 130 pieces and the puzzle is called "Christ's Body" Now, the first thing that I do is look on the front of the box to see what it is suppose to look like. In this case, we see in Scripture what the church should look like. As each piece is laid in place that is a new member of Christ's Body who has discovered who they are in Christ and has allowed God to activate their gifts. They are in place and ministering. Piece after piece is added. Now at some point if you are like me you start getting worried...are there enough pieces? Is something missing? As a Pastor what I have discovered is that when God hands you the box, every piece that you need is inside. In other words, God has provided every piece that we need to function as Christ's body right here on 16th street. Every piece is here. Imagine though that some pieces aren't willing lay down and lock themselves in with others. They are just not there yet. So, the picture of Christ's body is incomplete until we all become engaged and accept our role as a minister.

My question for you today is this...Are you engaged? Have you taken your place in the body of Christ? Have you discovered what God has called you to be and accepted that you are here to serve a higher purpose? Some of you are still works in progress. God has sent you into this body of believers and you are like this stone...full of possibilities and we know there are gifts and a purpose under those layers but you are still working on it. This challenge today is not intended to rush the work of God in your life. Some of you need some more time to discover how God wants to use you. But I can guarantee you this...when you figure it out, there will be

a place of ministry here at Northwest or in a campus ministry or in your home church that matches your exact shape and size.

I'm always amazed at how it works out. It is one of those divine mysteries that I love to see unfolding. Like how God brought Will here to fill a need like no one else can.

So, I want you to leave here today knowing that God has made you the way you are for a reason. He has a divine purpose for your life. Somewhere under those layers of rock is a masterpiece...a masterpiece that God wants to use to help others.

I want us to take a moment of reflection. In a time of prayer enter the presence of God and ask Him this question. "God, am I using my gifts and abilities with a level of commitment and quality that give honor to you?" Next time we'll take a look at the variety of gifts but let's just start there today.

REFLECTION

INTRO COMMUNION

Today it is very fitting that we move into a time at the Lord's Table. It's at the Lord's table that we are reminded that we are the body of Christ. We were made to be in community...to use our gifts in community...to strengthen the body of Christ. The Lord's table is a place where we celebrate our common heritage through the cross of Jesus.