

## 06.26.2022 WORSHIP SERVICE

### MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

Before we pray, I'll let you know that I was reminded that we're a week behind in our Camp Mennoscah listings. Becca Hein did indeed attend first camp this past week and now, heading out to camp today will be Jaxson, along with Delaney Duerksen and Emily Tyler, so we'll pray for them.

O God, our creator, you have summoned us, with all our foibles and giftedness, our anxieties and our confidence, our certainties and our doubts – you have called us here to worship you in spirit and in truth. You have invited us to use the gifts you've given us to praise you, to work together for making this world a more compassionate and beautiful place, for bringing your kingdom here on earth. As we look to the scriptures today and in the coming weeks, we pray for the leading of your spirit as we hear and learn more about your gifts and how you might be calling us to use them.

We thank you, God, for the ministry of Camp Mennoscah and other church camps. Thank you for the unique ways that you can make yourself known to people in a camp setting – ways that just don't seem to happen anywhere else in the same way. We pray for Jaxson, Delaney and Emily as they leave this afternoon for a week at camp. Open their hearts, and those of all the other campers, to the experiences of your spirit that they might learn something new this week about you and about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We pray for the staff and volunteers who will all work hard to help it be a good week at camp. We ask for safety and health for everyone.

Dear God, we pray for those in our circle – family, friends, brothers and sisters within the church, other friends we're aware of – those who are sick or in need of healing of any kind. We think of those who are anticipating appointments or procedures in the coming days. We think of Lois Janzen at the rehab unit as she works hard to regain strength and mobility. Be her comfort and her courage. We pray for Diana Schunn as she continues to wait for a heart transplant. We also pray for comfort and courage for her, for perseverance and patience. We pray that a heart will become available for her soon and that her body will accept it and take life from it. We pray for those who are on extended journeys of healing, especially Steve Banman and Gene Hastings as their cancer treatments continue – often with harsh physical consequences. Be with Sandy and Cindy as they continue to offer care and support. O God, we offer prayers this morning for our elderly loved ones who need more care as they age. Be close to those who live in nursing care facilities as they struggle to feel empowered and to know their value and worth. Make your loving presence very real to them each day.

Beyond our own community, God, we pray for our world. We think of those in India and Bangladesh who are displaced and suffering with too much rain and flooding. We pray for those in Afghanistan, trying to recover from a strong and destructive earthquake this past week. We pray for Ukraine as they continue to fight this uninvited war and deal with grief, anger and

trauma. O God, be with us now as we continue to worship you. May we be moved by your Spirit to use for good, the gifts you've given to each one of us. We pray in Jesus' name.

## SERMON - BRINGING OUR DIFFERING GIFTS – PASTOR CALEB YODER

Romans 12:1-13

Most of us can name things we feel pretty good at or at least enjoy doing. All of us can also name things we don't feel very good at.

My dad started out as a diesel mechanic, and later became a dealer for a certain brand of lawn mowers. I'm really not very mechanically-inclined. I guess that's why I ended up writing sermons.

[SLIDE: SHOP AREA]

True, I did learn a few things over the years. I could do basic service for a mower. At one time, I knew where every grease zerk was on the Walkers, and there are too many.

When I did work for my dad, I did anything IT-related, sometimes bookkeeping, sometimes tried to find better places to their inventory, or hopelessly tried to make their software slightly closer to accurately tracking that inventory, and then there was always grunt work.

There aren't too complicated of skill-sets involved in scraping the caked-on, moldy grass off the bottom of a mower-deck – mostly time and patience.

Over the years, my Dad often expressed amazement at the things that came natural to me, but felt beyond him.

Many of us are good at disparaging our own gifts and coveting the gifts of others. Looking back, I know I have lost more time than I care to admit wishing I was someone different; sometimes feeling there wasn't really a place for my strengths or other times letting myself become defined by my weaknesses.

---

For a few weeks, we're going to talk about how we offer our gifts and strengths for the sake of building up the church. This isn't about simply *having* strengths and also a different thing than setting up a competition for who's the best.

You might remember that a few months ago, our congregational Vision team created a summary of the conversations that took place around what it means to be church.

This vision process isn't finished. In that summary, we heard you say that we need to "Empower each person to be aware of their gifts/strengths." Along with that, that we need to be led first by the gifts and passions among us more than our current structure.

So we'll take a step back and look at one of the passages in the New Testament about gifts. It is really just a few verses, but I selected additional verses so that we would hear the bigger discussion in Romans 12.

This will not be a traditional overview of “spiritual gifts,” but rather trying to learn more about how we can become energized to offer our gifts and move further on our journeys of transformation.

[SLIDE: CHART OF GIFTS]

As you can see on the screen, there are multiple passages that mention gifts. Sometimes, but not always, they are called “spiritual gifts” – which refers to the Holy Spirit as the source of the gift.

The word for “gift,” *charism*, is built off of the word for “grace.” The gifts as we will think of them, are not things anyone deserves credit for, not personal *talents* or *skills*, but the diverse aptitudes that God gives us according to the undeserved *grace* that God has given each of us. They are undeserved privileges.

Looking at these lists together, one thing that you quickly notice is that there isn’t one definitive list of gifts. It seems like Paul should have been a little more consistent if he wanted churches everywhere to land up with the exact same list.

There is a slightly different emphasis in each list. In Romans, the important thing is the way these different activities or functions are all important for the life of the church. These seven activities seem to be essential works for the church to grow in love.

1 Corinthians is concerned a little more with extraordinary spiritual manifestations like speaking in tongues, as this is what that church was arguing about. Ephesians gives us five formalized leadership roles in the church.

Each of these distinct emphases shows us that there wasn’t a one-size-fits all message, but one that depended on the church and the particular challenges they were facing.

[CONTEXT OF ROMANS 12]

It’s also important to see the larger discussion that the verse about gifts falls in the Romans passage. We start with often-quoted words in verses one and two about not being conformed to the pattern of this world, but being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

In very thick language, Paul gives us a purpose statement in which our transformation as individuals and a congregation is the goal.

The church no longer participated in animal sacrifices that were the center of Jewish worship. Instead, in view of God’s merciful action to us, our lives become a metaphorical and spiritual replacement for the system of animal sacrifices.

We are offering our lives to God – including our gifts! – and when we live out of our God-given strengths for the sake of God’s reign, then we please God. These verses tell us it *is* possible to please God.

They call us to live by a different pattern, however, than the pattern of domination, of winners and losers, of self-serving, and of callous indifference to oppression and violence that our present-day world exhibits.

Then, in verse 3, Paul describes what kind of mindset or attitude that he hopes will characterize the church. The answer is that it will be one of humility. Humility isn't despising yourself, or being riddled with self-doubt.

Humility is instead being released from the logic of having to be the "best" in order to have value. When we know our value that comes purely from God's grace, we can be realistic about ourselves, and our strengths and weaknesses.

Paul uses three words all based on a root word for "thinking" or "mindset." Instead of thinking too highly of ourselves (or maybe taking ourselves too seriously), he calls us to think with a "sound" or healthy mind.

#### ONE BODY, MANY PARTS

Paul moves on to describe the church as being like a body with different body parts. Each time this metaphor occurs in the New Testament, it is in slightly different form.

Here we have a picture of disparate, different people with different gifts, coming together to function as one body. This miracle is accomplished "in Christ," that is because of the work of Christ, and when each one is connected to Christ. It is kind of a mystery and a vision to live into.

Then Paul moves on to describe the "gifts." These are different activities in the life of the church, including prophesy, service, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. They clearly have to do with personal aptitudes, but the emphasis is that they are not really our own, but special abilities given to us as an act of God's grace.

#### LOVE

Then as the chapter continues, the discussion moves from differentiated gifts to the qualities of love that all are called to exhibit.

Here I will not go into any depth. Paul says that love must be "genuine" or "sincere." Love is not a matter of pretending. Paul lists a number of actions that seem best to be a continued description of love: rejecting what is evil, holding fast to what is good, being devoted to one another in brotherly or sisterly affection. Persisting in times of suffering, Pursuing the love of strangers.

In the verses that follow, we have a description of a peaceable way of life that is radically different than the "pattern of the world."

Meanwhile, I want to say a little more about what it means to offer our gifts.

[SLIDE: KEY INSIGHTS]

The first point seems obvious, but needs to be stated.

We have to identify our gifts and strengths and embrace them. Our strengths are what God has designed each of us to offer, and we can't swap them for what we'd rather have instead.

We are naturally more energized when we are working out of our God-given strengths rather than trying to fit a different mold.

Many of us have work to do in identifying our gifts and strengths. They are not necessarily the same thing as "natural talent." They are also not necessarily the same thing as something you *can* do and feel you *should* do. We can't forever function doing what we think we *should* do, and ignore what gives us *joy*, especially when it is God-given joy.

Our gifts may not be easily identified in terms of a "task." Instead, you might need to think, what's behind these tasks I enjoy that gives insight into what God calls me to offer? Maybe I enjoy relating to people, or solving a tricky problem. Or using my hands.

Sometimes, we can reconceive of activities that aren't your favorite through the lens of our underlying gifts, and find satisfaction in something you didn't think you'd like doing.

For example, you might think you hate doing something up in front of people, but if you focus less on that and more on how it is energizing to craft words or to practice music, you experience it differently.

Often, instead of struggling to fix our weaker areas, it is more effective to grow in the areas that already give us joy. Sometimes, our strengths can compensate for our weaknesses, and other times we simply need to own who we are, in such a way that we can ask the help of others without guilt or shame. Gifts are a matter of grace. In Paul's language, we "have differing gifts according to the grace given us."

We do need to be clear that this is not quite the same as saying, "do whatever feels good." A strength meets the biblical definition of "gift" when it is used as an expression of love ("let your love be genuine...").

When it is used to build up the body ("So we who are many, are one body in Christ")

When it is not used to conform to the pattern of this world.

When it is used in a spirit of humility ("think of yourself with sober or realistic judgement").

God has given us strengths and gifts that we are called to discover and offer. But this comes with some caveats.

We don't get to spend 100% of the time living out of our gifts. No one ever said, "my gift is cleaning toilets" (though maybe your gift might be a willingness to do whatever needs to be done).

We have to sometimes be willing to do what we neither like nor feel "gifted at." It's not a matter of comparing or being "good enough." You just do the best you can. As a parent of young children, I don't have the luxury of saying, "well, parenting isn't my gift."

In the church we will sometimes need to contribute in ways that don't completely match our gifts, or do tasks we don't find particularly energizing.

We also have to make a distinction between essential tasks and activity that possibly can be let go if no one is any longer energized by it.

Living out of our strengths also includes a willingness to step back. Just because you have a hammer doesn't mean everything is a nail.

Each of us have valuable gifts, and we need to show grace and understanding to others who are wired differently. We are not called to be firehoses.

We can't spend 100% of the time living out of our gifts, strengths, or preferences. But it is also true that we will be needlessly frustrated and miss out on the joy and the calling God has planned for us, if we do not discover our gifts, develop our gifts, and find the courage to use our gifts -- whether or not someone taps you on the shoulder and offers you your dream position.

#### DISCERN

Paul calls us to discern God's will in verse 2. This surely includes our individual and corporate discernment in how to discover our strengths.

How to develop our strengths? How to use our time and energy?

When is the best time to function out of our strengths? When to hold back? When to say "no"?

When to try something new, and accept the discomfort that brings?

When to accept necessary work that is not our favorite?

When to forge a way, even when there is not presently a "structure" for it? (more on that next week).

#### CONCLUSION

Let's do the work of understanding and developing our strengths both as individuals and as a church in a spirit of humility. Let's each work at having healthy egos – not feeling over-important or under-important, not expecting credit. Instead, know yourself to be loved and to belong by God's grace, and serve out of that base.

It is an exciting journey to embrace the person that God has made each of us to be.

[SLIDE: EPHESIANS 2:10]

Ephesians 2:10 says, "Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives." The word "accomplishment" in Greek is the source of the English word "poem." Imagine ourselves as a poem that God is writing.

May it be so.

**BENEDICTION**

Go, remembering that in Christ we are one body.

Be assured that God has not made a mistake with anyone of us.

We have the gifts that we need and gifts yet to be discovered,

To be Christ's hands and eyes and ears and feet and mouth. Amen.