

Gifts, Services, Activities

1 Corinthians 12:1-11
January 30, 2022

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

Today during worship we will ordain, install and commission new servant leaders for the church, for you the congregation, and for the community we serve. But first – before the new Elders, Deacons and Trustees take office – we will all reaffirm our baptismal vows, that commitment we live into each day to be the hands and feet and heart of Jesus.

Now, being the hands and feet and heart of Jesus, that's a pretty tall order. In minister to the needs of others on his behalf, how. How do we know what to do? Do we really have what it takes to be of help? How would we know what to say?

I have a friend named Jon who has a prison ministry – leading Bible studies for inmates at the Cole County Detention Center in Jefferson City. Jon doesn't know much about the inmates he ministers to, so he really has to rely on God to lead him. As the inmates struggle to find hope in such a hopeless place, Jon will remind them of the love of their mother. It's very reassuring. But during one recent session, Jon turned to one of the inmates and said, "You know how much your grandma loves you. That's never going to change." Now Jon didn't know anything about this young man and his grandmother, and he'd never spoken of someone's grandmother before. But over and over again during the session, when he talked to that particular inmate, Jon would mention the young man's grandmother. When the study was over, Jon said to the young man, "You and your grandma are close, aren't you?" The inmate crossed his fingers to show how close he is with his grandmother. "She's the first person I'm going to see when I get out of here," he said. "She's a very religious person and I can't wait to see her." Now that's relying on God in service to another.

The Apostle Paul, in his message to the congregation in Corinth, says this about how we are called to serve. "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses."

Amid the hopelessness of prison life, the Spirit of God chose Jon to utter just the right words at just the right time to just the right person.

Showing up each day for that kind of ministry, that's an act of faith, faith that God will help you know what to do, what to say, and provide you with what you need to be of help to others.

If you're ever wondering if you have what it takes to be the hands and feet and heart of Jesus to someone in your life, trust me, you do, we all do. The Apostle Paul assures us of this, saying, "... Concerning spiritual gifts," ... I do not want you to be uninformed. ... I want you to understand that no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

This means that from the moment of your baptism – the moment you received Jesus as Lord and Savior – God has been there for you, and God is counting on you to be there for him.

In her book "You're out of Date, God?" Barbara Jurgensen tells of wanting to spend her days living the kind of Christian life she'd like to.¹ One night when she said her prayers, she asked God to help her live a really Christian life." The next morning, she woke up thinking about her prayer. But even before she got out of bed, the telephone rang. It was her next-door neighbor. She'd had a terrible toothache all night and needed to get to the dentist, but her little boy was home sick. Of course Barbara said she'd be right over. She gave little Billy his breakfast and took care of him. "And there went my morning," she thought to herself.

But she still had the rest of the day. As Barbara finished up the lunch dishes, she thought of what she could do in the afternoon that would really be of service to God. Just then, there was a knock at the door.

It was a friend with a couple of dresses over her arm, asking if Barbara would help her shorten them. She got out her pins and we went to work. The time passed quickly as they drank coffee and visited while she sewed. There went her afternoon. It was suppertime before she had a chance to think of her desire to live that day as the kind of Christian life she'd always wanted to be. As she peeled potatoes, she tried to think of some big, important thing she could do in the evening that would really be serving God. But before she could think of anything, her husband George came in the back door and said, "We're having company this evening!" George had met a fellow that day who just moved into town, just a few blocks away. "He's had a lot of trouble finding a job," said George, "because he has a prison record. I thought maybe I can find a place for him down at the plant. I hope it's okay with you that I invited him." "Sure," said Barbara. "It's fine." Their new neighbor came and everyone enjoyed the evening. And then it was bedtime. "Another day has passed," thought Barbara, "in which I haven't lived the kind of Christian life I'd like to be living." In that night's prayers, Barbara turned to God and said, "I want so much to serve you, God. But how can I with all these interruptions?"

¹ Barbara Jurgensen, *You're out of Date, God?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1971), 45-47.

I was in prison and you came to me. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was hungry and you gave me food; I was sick and you visited me.

From the moment you received Jesus as Lord and Savior, God has been there for you, and God is counting on you to be there for him. "...There are varieties of gifts," says Paul, "but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."

Gifts, services and activities. We each have been given gifts by the Holy Spirit, to serve in the name of the Lord, in whatever activities God is calling us to. Whatever activities you have planned for today, this week, God is out ahead of you preparing a time and place where you can make a difference in the life of another person, through the gifts of the Spirit.

Now if you're sitting there wondering what spiritual gifts you have, Paul tells us. "To each (of you) is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good," says Paul, and he lists these spiritual gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy which is really truth-telling, discernment, tongues or speaking from the heart, and the interpretation of tongues, which is the act of listening from the heart.

I guarantee that each of you in worship today – each member and friend of this church – has what it takes to minister to someone in need using one or more of these spiritual gifts – wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, truth-telling, discernment, speaking from the heart, and listening from the heart.

And all it takes is a willingness to show up – to go where God would lead you – and an openness to discover how you can serve the Lord, relying on the Holy Spirit to guide you, equip you and strengthen you. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Lord God in heaven, today we gather as your people to worship you in spirit and truth. We celebrate your life in us and celebrate the church as the body of Christ, ministering to all the world.

Help us to reflect your love for us in the love we have for each other. It is with great joy that we come before you today, joined by your Spirit.

We are thankful that we can comfort one another with the same love and mercy that has comforted us. Praise be to you.

We pray your Spirit of comfort and healing upon those dealing with illness and disease. And we thank you for the ways that we are called to join in ministry together, and the blessings we receive from ministering in your name.

Let us rejoice in who you made us to be, as we use our gifts and talents, our time and energy to build up the kingdom of God.

We pray all this in the name of the one who came to serve, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.