

Epler's Church UCC, Leesport, PA July 28, 2019.

Sermon. Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

“Don't Forget...To Use Your Gifts”

I began preparing for my sermon this week by listening to a song by Casting Crowns entitled, “If We are the Body.” A very fitting song for a sermon and a time when we are thinking about how we are all a part of the body of Christ and how we can all use our gifts. The chorus of the song goes like this: “If we are the body, why aren't his arms reaching; why aren't his hands healing; why aren't his words teaching? Why aren't his feet

going? Why is his love not showing them there is a way? There is a way.”

Powerful words for a church to hear as we continue with our ministry. Words that help us to think, or at least should have us think, what it means for us to be the church. I enjoy the song and how it can make us think. I also like the scriptures that I chose for this morning.

Our 1 Corinthians text is used when we install a new consistory: “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same God is served.” Whenever we call a new group of

people and elect them to serve on consistory or for any group to do the work of the church, we are able to see this scripture.

Right now, our consistory is made up of 11 people that come from different backgrounds and different skillsets. It is great when a group of individuals can come together and make a difference for the work of the church all using their various gifts.

I have always loved the imagery that comes in these letters from Paul. The body of Christ being made up of different parts. The Spirit gives each of us the ability to do our tasks, just like the disciples on that first Pentecost.

Paul's idea in the 1 Corinthians text is to stress the essential unity of the Church. The Church is the body of Christ and the characteristic of a healthy body is that every part in it performs its own function for the good of the whole. Paul recognizes that the gift is of the same Spirit and is not designed for the glory of that one person, but for the church as a whole.

Many times when preachers and people study this text they focus so much on the gifts like speaking, praying, teaching, and writing—the more or less intellectual gifts. It is not good to focus only on those gifts; however, and negate the person who

can work with their hands. Those people like the carpenter, electrician, painter, or plumber all have their special gifts.

Paul also speaks of the gift of healing in this passage. There is no doubt that gifts of healing did exist in the early church; Paul would not have cited them unless they happened, but we cannot get so focused on the main idea of what we think of when the word healing is said.

We usually think of doctors and medicine and that is certainly an important part of healing and what was being described here, but we should not take this too literally for today.

In a few moments we are going to have our monthly “healing service” which includes anyone who wishes to come up and receive a special prayer/blessing. We don’t expect our prayer to heal someone of an illness, but we do hope that the prayer will help move toward a place of Spiritual healing as well as physical healing. We say a prayer that will hopefully comfort the one who receives it and recognize the Spirit working through them for healing in its many forms.

We all might have different gifts for healing in some way. Maybe you took the time to check on your neighbor this past week because it was so warm and you knew that they didn’t

have air conditioning; you might have allowed them to know that they were supported and care for by someone. Maybe you reach out to that church member that we haven't seen in worship for awhile and you want to make sure that they are ok. We can do some amazing healing with just the simple checking in with someone.

This is a type of healing that isn't always seen by us like a doctor might see if a person gets healthier, but it is a healing just the same. This is just one gift that the Spirit can bestow upon us.

The Romans text talks about how Paul had a favorite thought about comparing the Christian Church as a body. Each part of the body carries its own function. It was Paul's conviction that the Christian Church should be like that. Everyone using their own gifts for the work of the church. Paul and I would have gotten along, I think. He might have liked my sermon title for today. Don't forget...to use your gifts.

Paul wants us to know ourselves. We all have gifts. Sometimes, we may not recognize them and it takes another person to tell us that we have a certain gift. Sometimes, we may think that we don't have any gifts at all, but we do have many

different things that we can do. The trick sometimes, is learning how those gifts can be used in the church.

One of the things that my family does right now is watch America's Got Talent together. It is our family time when we get the chance. I'm not sure how some of the people on that show could use their gifts of throwing knives at people blindfolded could be used in a church, but I'm sure that we can find ways to use certain skills to do the work of God.

Paul also wants us to not only know our gifts and recognize our gifts, but to also accept them. Sometimes our gifts are not what we think that they should be or think that we can be useful

in that way (like throwing knives), but everyone has different talents and skills and Paul wants us to not just recognize them but accept them.

Paul also wants people to know that the gifts that they have are from God. This is where the 1 Corinthians text comes in. Paul speaks to those people about the Holy Spirit giving people these gifts and these abilities.

Paul's final thought is that not only do we have gifts; not only do they come from God; not only do we have to accept them; but we have got to use what we've got!

Paul believes that it is our duty as people of God to use those gifts.

What is your gift? What have you thought about as I have been speaking this morning that has jumped out to you as something that you can do...or already do? There are churches that put together a gifts assessment and have people fill out a survey to help them to recognize what gifts they have and how they can help within the church.

I encourage you to think about what gifts you can use. And I don't just want to focus on how you can "help the church." You may be good with finances, but that doesn't mean that we

would expect you to be on the church finance committee.

Maybe your gifts could be used helping low-income families with their taxes or helping the elderly with some financial advice or support.

Maybe your gifts are used helping to teach someone how to use technology or play an instrument or any number of things that you might be able to think of. Last week I asked people to let me know if they thought that they might want to do some kind of Spiritual Practice or Retreat in order to not forget to take care of themselves. This week, I am going to ask you to think

about what gifts you have and how they might be able to help those in your community or your church family.

We have many gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. We are many parts of the One Body of Christ. Don't forget...to use your gifts! Amen.