

“Body By Jesus” - Part 1

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16



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Last week, we began what I hope will be a pacesetter series of sermons answering this question. “Are you a growing disciple of Jesus Christ?” A growing disciple of Jesus is one who has a growing prayer life both personally and at church in which there is a greater awareness of God’s presence and a faith approach to life. A growing disciple is regularly present in worship growing in our praise of God and is growing in our oneness with each other. A growing disciple is one whose finances are centered in Christ as we offer our money in ways that not only fund our church’s ministries but literally change the world. The benefit there is that we find ways to manage the 90% that remains (a tithe belongs to God) that outdoes when we keep 100% or almost that to ourselves. A growing disciple is one is being used of God more in his or her time and talents both inside and outside the church. Again, I ask you, “Are you a growing disciple in your prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service?”

Last week, we look at prayer as the crucial foundation. On both campuses there were people who shared with us that you were challenged as we shared about the importance of faith in prayer. Remember that one of the themes was choosing to believe more than we were used to believing, even in the midst of our doubts. This week, the staff was batting around this topic. I wished we had the discussion on video. For there was very real and positive faith mixed with very honest questions and struggle when prayers are not answered as we would like. We shared how it was important to encourage one another’s faith and at the same time hold one another up when those times of genuine doubt come.

Today, we share in the first of two sermons about the sharing of our time and talents. Our dream is that every growing disciple of Jesus Christ in St. Luke’s Lubbock will have at least one way of sharing his or her God-given talents in the church and one way of sharing God-given talents in the world. If that dream was realized we would be a revolutionary church. The average church follows the 80/20 rule of most organizations in that 80% of the ministry is done by 20% of the people. Funding percentages often track the same way. The problem with that is two-fold. The 20% carrying the 80% of the work and financial load get very tired. But also the 80% who are underused in the church end up missing out on the fullness of God’s blessing in their lives. I invite you to prayerfully ask God to make us the exception to that rule. For if everyone does a little in the church, then all of us grow a lot and burnout is nearly absent. But what is even more exciting is when all of us are sharing in ministry a little outside the walls of St. Luke’s. For while some of the 20% are doing wonderful ministry outside the church, most of them are too busy inside the church to go outside. I have realized that my own profile outside the walls of this church and outside the confines of our congregation is woefully low. Pray that I will hear God’s call to be more out in the community, just as I am praying for you to do the same.

Are you growing in the sharing of your God-given talents inside and outside the church? To ask that question is to ask a more fundamental question: Who or what is the church? Some times the bible treats the church as an “it.” The word ecclesia, which Jesus used, is borrowed from secular society. It means a group within a larger group. When Jesus said “Upon this rock, I will build my church,” he meant that we would be a group within society that would witness to God’s kingdom on this earth. At other times, the church is described as a “she.” In “The Church’s One Foundation”, we sing, “And she on earth has union with God the three in one.” One of the biblical pictures of the church is as “the bride of Christ.” Today, our scripture lesson talks about the church

as “the body of Christ”, another “it” image. But our church has done something peculiar with the church as in “it.” We’ve treated it as something separate from ourselves. We’ll say, “That church meets our needs” or “that church doesn’t meet our needs.” “That church has wonderful worship” or “that church doesn’t have wonderful worship.” I want to ask people who talk like that, and many of us do, is “Who do we think ‘that church’ is? For, in the truth, the church is more than an “it,” and more than a “she.” The church is a “we.” The church is what our shared gifts are by the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is not a building, nor is it an institution. It is a network of people who follow Christ together. In the name of Christ and by the power of the Spirit, we are our strengths and we are our weaknesses. We don’t just “go” to church, we are the church. The hymn by Avery and Marsh sings,

I am the church, you are the church,
 We are the church together,
 All who follow Jesus, all around the world,
 Yes, we’re the church together.

Nearly two months ago, we made a daring decision, to hire two part-time children’s ministries directors, one for each campus. It would be understandable that some people would say, “Now that we have a children’s ministries director, we have somebody to do children’s worship and we have somebody to teach a rotation of the Sunday School class. Now that they are in place, they can do more and we can do less.” In the church, that kind of conversation is pure profanity. It is part of that “pray and pay” understanding of church that kills churches. Karen Carruth and Debra Nail have been placed in leadership to multiply the sharing around them, not do it all themselves. The same will be true when Matthew Coffman arrives in late December. I remember when I arrived as Director of Music in Alamogordo how the senior pastor came up to me and said, “Will, I’m glad you’re here. I’m out of the music business.” In less than three months, I will get to say that to Matthew. But you will not. For he has not come to direct “all” the choirs or be the initiator of all that happens in the music ministries of St. Luke’s Lubbock. He will be multiplying the sharing around him.

Norman Neaves, pastor of the Church of the Servant in Oklahoma City tells his staff, “If I found you doing the ministry instead of resourcing it, I will call you in and ask you why. If I find you doing that a second time, I will ask for your resignation.” That sounds extreme, but it is very biblical.

The church is not staffed by “hired hands” to do ministry for us, because they are the best and most professionally trained. The church is staff by spirit-led resource people who help every person find their ministries both inside and outside the church. Then the church doesn’t just grow, it multiplies.

The bible’s way of talking about this is when Paul describes the church as “the body of Christ.” As a body, we are one unit. According to Ephesians 4, we are held together by “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” We are not a collective of individuals, a group of mini mes. That is actually what most churches are like, a group of individuals each trying to get what they need for their personal spiritual lives. No wonder we never quite find what we’re looking for! God didn’t put us together for that purpose. When Jesus chose those twelve disciples he chose a diverse group of people who would of necessity need each other and need the power of God’s Spirit to pull off the mission. God has not called you here to be a consumer who gets what you need. God has called you here to be together in relationship and together say and do what God needs in the church and in the world. When we have that kind of focus, we will be surprised to find out that getting our own needs met is no longer an issue.

In this design by Christ, it is assumed that each of us is crucially and uniquely gifted. Paul writes,

“But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

In this sense, everyone is part of God’s gifted and talented program. GT does not refer to a better disciple but every disciple. It is not a status. But it does say that we need to figure out how God has gifted us. I am a visionary, but I am not a details man. I am a talent scout, but I am not the trainer. I am a good process man in that I watch what happens to people as ministries develop, but I am not the one who makes sure things get done. I am a good launch person, but it will take others to carry it for the long haul. There are issues and passions both in the church and outside the church which will be my thing. But you never want the church to be limited to “my thing” any more than you want it to be limited to “your thing.” I am gifted and talented, and I am purposely

ungifted and untalented. We have known each other for nearly four years now. My strengths and weaknesses are secret to no one. I'm through apologizing for that. I am committed to growing in who I am and what I do, but I am absolutely dependent on God's GT program with you. That's what it means to be part of the "body by Jesus."

Now the question is, "How are you gifted and talented?" In the body of Christ, giftedness shows up in two ways. Part of this giftedness shows up naturally. These gifts are no different than the talents you share with your family, friends and co-workers. Together, the body of Christ at St. Luke's Lubbock is amazingly naturally gifted. We have carpenters, accountants, teachers, musicians, scientists, counselors, lawyers, florists, athletes, politicians, and the list goes on. They do that out of God-given natural giftedness. For some reason, some people are afraid to share their natural giftedness in the church, as if the Church is a place where those kinds of gifts don't apply or might not be welcome. Christians are not only naturally gifted; they are supernaturally gifted with gifts that emerge and develop out of our growing walk with Jesus Christ. Some of those are natural gifts that get freed up in us. Most of the gifts I use in St. Luke's Lubbock are ones that were either dormant or seemingly not there at all prior to meeting Christ. Other gifts are the ones Paul lists in Ephesians,

"It was he who gave some to be apostles [leadership and developers of churches and new ventures in faith], some to be prophets [people who hear and proclaim God's word for the people], some to be evangelists [people who share faith that leads new people to follow Jesus], some to be pastors [people who care for the spiritual and personal needs of others], and teachers [people who instruct others in the faith with effectiveness]."

The list is not exhaustive, but rather for illustration. These are just some of the gifts that God gives us and frees up in us as we follow him.

And why has God gifted us, or better stated, graced us in this way. The bible is very clear here – "to prepare us for works of service." Notice that it doesn't say so that people will love you more and so you can feel more fulfilled. We are gifted by the glory of God to serve the church and the world around us. In this way, we are not self-service or better said, selfish with our gifts and talents. One of the liberating words that I have received from the Lord this week was that I was gifted to play my part in the body of Christ, so that I could make a unique contribution to the church and the world in partnership with others. The goal is not popularity and personal fulfillment, but service. Popularity and positive response to your gifts is never promised in scripture. And fulfillment happens in relationship with Christ as we grow in love for him and for others. One of the big themes for ministry is that we are a church without walls in two ways. We are without walls in that we can be at more than one location. And more importantly, we are a church committed to getting beyond our walls and sharing who we are and what we have with the outside world. That's also true for us as individuals. I began to pray this week, "Lord, help me to get out of myself and just share to the glory of God."

Here is what I want you to take from this sermon today. First, we want to be part of changing the 80/20 rule. We challenge every person to find the way God has gifted him or her to strengthen the church and change the world. We hope you will see the staff as people placed by God among us to free up our ministries and multiply their use in the church and in the world. Second, we hope you will see the church as less of an "it" and more of a "we." We are the church. Third, we hope you will see that all of us are God's GT disciples, gifted naturally from birth and supernaturally as we grow in our walk with Christ. And fourth, I invite you to join me in getting out of yourself and freely sharing who you are and what you have to the glory of God.

St. Luke's Lubbock is a great church. First of all, we are great because we have a great God. Second of all, we are great because we have great people. But the challenge for today is that there is yet a greater greatness to be seen at St. Luke's Lubbock, when we turn ourselves outward and join together as the body of Christ.