

“What I Said I Would Do: II - Serve”
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October 19, 2008

I Corinthians 12:4-11

Years ago, the Salvation Army was holding an international convention, and their founder, General William Booth, was scheduled to be the keynote speaker. Everyone was very excited about it, and looking so forward to hearing him speak, but word came that he had fallen ill, and wouldn't be able to make the trip. Nonetheless, committed leader that he was, he told the organizers that he would send his remarks to them via cable (that's how it was done in those days). So, the organizers anxiously awaited the cable, and finally it arrived. They tore it open to find the entire speech - and lo and behold, it consisted of one word. One word that Gen. Booth wanted those gathered to hear, and the word was this: OTHERS.

That said it all. It's all about OTHERS. A most fitting word for the mission of the Salvation Army.

But it's also a most fitting word for today's sermon. For today's sermon, the second sermon in the “What I Said I Would Do” series - is about service, and service of course, is all about OTHERS.

When we joined the church we said we would support it by “our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.” Today we focus on service, on what we promised to do for others - most particularly, what we promised to do for God through our service to others.

Both of this morning's lessons focus on service. In the Gospel lesson, we find Jesus calling some men into ministry. You see, He knew that each of them had something to offer in service to Him and to others. He knew that each one had been uniquely gifted by God, and so He invited them to join Him on an adventure of service, if you will. “You are good fishermen. From now on, come along with me and use those same skills to help me fish for people for the Kingdom of God.”

I wonder? If Jesus were to walk by you, what gift do you have that you think Jesus would pick up on? What gift would He invite you to use in God's great adventure of life, to reach out and take care of others? Think about that for a few moments. What gift would Jesus identify in you?

I know a lot about some of you, and not as much about others of you. But I can tell you, that if Jesus walked down these aisles today, He would find persons with gifts of building and creating, others with gifts of healing and caring, still others with gifts of athletics and music, yet others with gifts of cooking and cleaning, and others with gifts of administration and finance. He could turn around and find writers, teachers, knitters and painters.

Truth be told, Jesus could stop and talk to every single person in this place, and in each one He would identify a gift that could be used to serve. In every single person here.

The lesson from I Corinthians reminded us so beautifully that indeed, all of us are gifted, and all of the gifts are equally important. No one gift is better than another, no one servant more important than another. All of the gifts are valued because they all help to build up the body of Christ and usher in the Kingdom of God.

So too are all the jobs, the tasks of the church valued equally as well. Of course, over the history of the church, we humans have tended to try to rank jobs in the church just like we rank everything else in life. Oh well, the Chairperson of the Administrative Council must be much more important than say, the person who volunteers in the nursery. No, not at all. Not at all. All gifts are important, all service matters, and none ranks higher than any another.

You know, once, during a time of emergency in the Second World War, there was dire need for England to increase its production of coal. Winston Churchill called together a group of labor leaders to enlist their support and get them going on it. At the end of his presentation, he asked them to picture in their minds a parade which he knew would be held in Piccadilly Circus after the war.

First, he said, would come the sailors who had kept the vital sea lanes open. Then would come the soldiers who had come home from Dunkirk and then gone on to defeat Rommel in Africa. Then would come the pilots who had driven the Luftwaffe from the sky.

Last of all, he said, would come a long line of sweat-stained, soot-streaked men in miner's caps. Someone would cry from the crowd, "And where were you during the critical days of our struggle?" And from 10,000 throats would come the answer, "We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal." (Don McCullough, *Waking from the American Dream*)

You see, every gift matters, every person using their gift matters when it comes to serving our Lord. No matter what your gift, you matter as much as

anyone else. You are needed. Your gift is needed. Our church's work is not complete without your gift being used.

In his very famous book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Pastor Rick Warren writes this, "You were put on earth to make a contribution. You weren't created just to consume resources - to eat, breathe, and take up space. God designed you to make a difference with your life. While many best-selling books offer advice on how to 'get' the most out of life, that's not the reason God made you. You were created to **add** life on earth, not just take from it. God wants you to give something back." (p. 227)

He goes on to say that "you're not saved by service, but you are saved **for** service. In God's kingdom, you have a place, a purpose, a role, and a function to fulfill." (p. 228)

Finally, he says, "Serving is the opposite of our natural inclination. Most of the time we're more interested in 'serve us' than service. We say, 'I'm looking for a church that meets my needs and blesses me,' not 'I'm looking for a place to serve and be a blessing.' We expect others to serve us, not vice versa. But as we mature in Christ (Warren concludes), the focus of our lives should increasingly shift to living a life of service. The mature follower of Christ stops asking 'Who's going to meet my needs?' and starts asking, 'Whose needs can I meet?'" (p. 231)

So have you gotten there yet? Do you realize how valuable you are to God, and how valuable your gifts are to His work on this earth, and how much your service is needed? It is, in the end, all about how you feel about God, that determines how much you're willing to share your gifts.

One day, many years ago, the flight crew of a Western Airlines flight, was all excited when the venerable Harlan Sanders, founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken walked through the door of their plane. They were all tickled to death to meet him, and he politely shook all of their hands and then took his seat in first class and settled in. As the plane took off, he dropped his chin to his narrow black tie and nodded off to sleep.

A little while later, from the back of the plane, came the loud sounds of a very unhappy child. You knew what I mean! The child was shrieking, and nothing the parent could do would calm him down. Nothing - not food, drink, crayons, stuffed animals, nothing. And it was the kind of shrieking that sets every nerve in every body on the plane on edge.

Well, naturally, Col Sanders was awakened too, and one of the stewardesses apologized to him. "We've tried everything. We're very sorry." To which the colonel

replied, "I've got to speak to that child." So up to his feet he got, and with the aid of his cane, he sauntered down the aisle in the direction of the shrieking.

A few minutes later, miraculously the furor died down, and Col. Sanders slowly made his way back to his seat, his charm and warmth having worked its magic on the little boy. The flight attendants were all over him. 'Oh Colonel Sanders, thank you so much for helping us like that.'

To which he replied, "I didn't do it for you, I did it for the child." (Helen DeWar, Reader's Digest)

You see, Col. Sanders had it right. His heart was right where it should be. He got up and went to help because that child was unhappy, that child needed something.

That's why we serve too, friends, because there is unhappiness and need in God's world, with God's people. There is unhappiness and need all around us, and God wants us to use our gifts to help.

So what are your gifts and how can you, no, how will you help? The other night our Nominating Committee began working on naming persons to serve in all the ministry areas of our church, and I have to tell you, it takes an enormous amount of people, gifts and energy, to do all the things we believe God has called this church to do.

Why just this week alone, people in this church have gathered for worship, Sunday School, and small group studies, they've met to sing and ring, they've stuffed care packages for college students, prepared bulletins for worship, cooked meals for the sick and bereaved, mentored elementary school students, held a party for children who are hurting, sent cards to those who need to be lifted up, made phone calls to those who are homebound, cleaned the church, supported those stricken with grief - you see, the list goes on and on, but all of that took people willing to share the gifts that have been given by God - and they did, thanks be to God.

Still, we need you. Actually, God needs you to step up to the plate and offer your gifts too. There's a place for you, and your gift is needed. Think of what this church could do for God and God's people if all of us offered our gifts in service - like we said we would do. No excuses, no delays, no thinking that your gift is not that important - but all of us in service. Imagine what God could do through that kind of effort!

The Stewardship Committee of this church wants to challenge everyone to

find a way to serve this year, to use the gifts that God has given you. That's why they sponsored the Stewardship Fair last week so you could see all of the ministries in which our church is involved.

Now, in your bulletin this morning, you will find a salmon colored insert. It's a full sheet of paper entitled Talent/Service Pledge Sheet. Please take it out and let's look at it together.

On it you will see that you have an opportunity to let us know what you're already involved in, and if there's something you'd like to give up if you've been doing it awhile.

Then we'd like to know what area you'd like to use your gifts in - how you want to serve - simply circle an area you'd be interested in learning more about getting involved in.

On the back are a couple more questions - a general question about the gifts you have been given, and finally, an opportunity to show your interest in some of the committee work of our church.

We're going to take a little time now to allow you to fill out this sheet. We'd like everyone to fill one out - young and old, member or non-member - we'd like to offer everyone the opportunity to serve.

After a few minutes, we'll have a prayer, then sing the hymn, and as we sing, members of the Stewardship Committee, will collect the sheets, and they'll be brought to the altar as a part of our offerings.

As you prepare to consider how to serve, let me ask you to think again about this morning's Gospel lesson. Imagine yourself standing there with those fisherman, and think about the gifts Jesus would see in you. Then step out in faith, and look for ways to be in service using those gifts. God needs what only you have to give.

Let us pray: O Lord our God, we give you thanks for the gifts you have poured upon us. Give us the gifts of discernment and courage now as we make this commitment to You and Your Church. Amen.