

I Corinthians 12:1-11
January 17, '10

"TO EACH IS GIVEN"

I HAD A ROOMMATE IN COLLEGE WHO HAD A PART-TIME JOB THAT HE ABSOLUTELY LOVED.
HE WAS ALWAYS EXCITED TO GO TO WORK EVERY MORNING.
HE COULDN'T WAIT FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR TO END BECAUSE IT MEANT FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT FOR THE SUMMER.
IT WASN'T THE EXTRA PAY THAT HE ENJOYED AS MUCH AS IT WAS THE ACTUAL WORK.
AT THE END OF EACH DAY, HE'D COME BACK TO THE APARTMENT & REGALE US WITH HIS EXPERIENCES OF THE DAY.
BERT FOUND TREMENDOUS PURPOSE & SIGNIFICANCE IN HIS WORK & HE EVEN CONSIDERED DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL & MAKING THIS JOB THAT HE LOVED A FULL-TIME PROFESSION & LIFETIME CAREER.
HE WAS CERTAIN THERE WAS NO MORE IMPORTANT WORK IN SOCIETY & HE PASSIONATELY & CONVINCINGLY PRESENTED A CASE THAT WITHOUT THE WORK THAT HE & HIS CO-WORKERS DID, THE COMMUNITY WOULD FALL INTO CHAOS MORE QUICKLY THAN WITH THE LOSS OF ANY OTHER PROFESSION.
WHAT IN THE WORLD WAS IT THAT BERT WAS DOING PART-TIME DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR THAT WAS SO IMPORTANT?
WHAT FULL-TIME SUMMER JOB WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING ELSE IN SOCIETY?
BERT WAS A GARBAGE COLLECTOR – A "SANITATION ENGINEER," HE CALLED IT.
I WAS SURPRISED THAT A GARBAGE COLLECTOR WOULD HAVE AS MANY STORIES AS BERT DID, BUT EVERY DAY WAS A NEW ADVENTURE FOR HIM.
I LEARNED FIRST-HAND THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS JOB WHEN I LIVED IN A COMMUNITY THAT WENT THROUGH A BRIEF STRIKE OF ITS SANITATION WORKERS.
BERT FELT THAT HIS WORK AS A "SANITATION ENGINEER" WAS A CALLING & HE WOULDN'T BE SATISFIED WITH ANYTHING SHORT OF HIS BEST EFFORT AT COLLECTING GARBAGE.
I THOUGHT OF BERT JUST LAST WEEK AS I WAS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT DAY CHRISTMAS TREES WOULD BE PICKED UP BY THE CITY.
EARLY ONE MORNING, I WAS SEARCHING ONLINE FOR THE DATES & COULDN'T FIND IT ANYWHERE.
I HEARD THE YARD WASTE TRUCK TURN ONTO OUR STREET & HEAD TOWARD THE CUL-DE-SAC AT THE OTHER END.
ORDINARILY, IT TAKES A WHILE AS THE DRIVER HAS TO STOP AT NEARLY EVERY OTHER HOUSE TO PICK UP SOMETHING.
ON THIS PARTICULAR DAY, THOUGH - AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT – NO ONE HAD ANYTHING OUT & THE TRUCK WOULD BE PASSING OUR HOUSE BEFORE I HAD A CHANCE TO GET TO THE BACK YARD & PULL OUR TWO CHRISTMAS TREES AROUND FRONT.

I WENT ONTO THE STREET & WAVED MY ARMS, HOPING THE DRIVER WOULD STOP SO I COULD ASK WHEN TREES WOULD BE PICKED UP.

I WAS ALSO SECRETLY HOPING IT WOULD BE OUR REGULAR GUY BECAUSE HE WAS ALWAYS HELPFUL & ACCOMMODATING.

SURE ENOUGH, IT WAS HIM.

I SAID, "WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO PICK UP CHRISTMAS TREES?"

"THAT'S TODAY," HE SAID.

"OH, NO! I'VE GOT TWO TREES AROUND BACK. CAN YOU WAIT WHILE I DRAG THEM OUT TO THE STREET?"

THE GUY LOOKED AT ME LIKE I WAS CRAZY.

"HEY, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. I'LL GET 'EM."

AND BEFORE I KNEW WHAT HAPPENED, THE GUY WAS IN MY BACKYARD, PULLING TWO CHRISTMAS TREES THROUGH THE SNOW & THROWING THEM ONTO HIS TRUCK.

"THANKS....." AND I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HIS NAME.

HE'S BEEN PICKING UP OUR TRASH FOR YEARS & I DON'T EVEN KNOW THE GUY'S NAME.

WHenever I have something that's a little tough to get in the truck, he never utters a word of complaint.

HE HAS A SERVANT'S HEART & OBVIOUSLY ENJOYS HIS JOB AS MUCH AS BERT DID.

DARE I SAY THAT, LIKE ONE OF OUR ORDINATION & INSTALLATION QUESTIONS, HE *SERVES THE PEOPLE WITH ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION & LOVE?*

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THIS *DOES* RELATE TO THIS PASSAGE IN I CORINTHIANS.

THE CHURCH IN CORINTH WAS A CHURCH THAT HAD MORE THAN ITS SHARE OF PROBLEMS.

THIS IS THE SAME LETTER IN WHICH PAUL GIVES US THE FIRST ACCOUNT OF THE RESURRECTION.

AS I TELL YOU EVERY TIME WE SHARE COMMUNION – IT'S THE SAME LETTER THAT GIVES US THE EARLIEST ACCOUNT OF THE LAST SUPPER.

IT'S THE SAME LETTER THAT INCLUDES THE MOST BEAUTIFUL & MOVING WORDS ABOUT LOVE EVER WRITTEN.

BUT IN THE SECTION WE'VE READ THIS MORNING, PAUL IS PERTURBED WITH THE PEOPLE.

THE CHURCH IN CORINTH HAD DIVISIONS BECAUSE THERE WERE PEOPLE WITHIN THE BODY WHO THOUGHT WHAT THEY WERE DOING WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT SOMEONE ELSE WAS DOING.

THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE MORE SPIRITUAL BECAUSE OF THEIR PARTICULAR AREA OF EXPERTISE OR SPIRITUAL GIFTEDNESS.

PAUL WILL HAVE NO SUCH TALK & NO SUCH ATTITUDE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

HE TELLS THEM THAT EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING TO OFFER & EVERYONE'S PARTICULAR GIFT IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS ANYONE ELSE'S.

“TO EACH IS GIVEN,” PAUL SAID.

EVERYONE HAS BEEN GIVEN SOMETHING TO OFFER.

IN OUR NEW OFFICERS’ TRAINING MEETING YESTERDAY, WE PAID SPECIAL ATTENTION TO A GREAT PASSAGE IN OUR BOOK OF ORDER THAT SAYS *“THE EXISTENCE OF THE OFFICES OF ELDER & DEACON IN NO WAY DIMINISHES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COMMITMENT OF ALL MEMBERS TO THE TOTAL MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH. THESE ORDAINED OFFICERS DIFFER FROM OTHER MEMBERS IN FUNCTION ONLY.”*

EACH & EVERY ONE OF US IS VITAL TO THE WORK OF CHRIST WITHIN THIS BODY & WITHIN THE LARGER COMMUNITY.

“TO EACH IS GIVEN” SOMETHING FOR THE WORK OF CHRIST’S CHURCH IN THE WORLD.

IN ANOTHER SECTION, THE BOOK OF ORDER SAYS, *“MEMBERS AND OFFICERS ALIKE SERVE MUTUALLY UNDER THE MANDATE OF CHRIST WHO IS THE CHIEF MINISTER OF ALL. HIS MINISTRY IS THE BASIS OF ALL MINISTRIES; THE STANDARD FOR ALL OFFICES IS THE PATTERN OF THE ONE WHO CAME ‘NOT TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE.’”*

WE ARE ALL – EVERY ONE OF US – CALLED TO SERVE.

DO YOU WONDER, THOUGH, HOW YOUR SERVICE STACKS UP AGAINST OTHERS?

I’M NOT TALKING ABOUT WHAT’S MORE IMPORTANT BECAUSE THAT’S WHAT PAUL VEHEMENTLY SPOKE AGAINST.

I’M SIMPLY TALKING ABOUT YOUR WILLINGNESS TO GIVE WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER.

THINK ABOUT THIS IN OTHER AREAS OF LIFE.

HOW ABOUT YOUR JOB?

WHAT IF EVERYONE WORKED AS HARD AS YOU DO?

WOULD YOUR PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT BE BETTER OFF?

NOW, TO HEAR MOST OF THE CONVERSATIONS THAT TAKE PLACE ABOUT THE WORKPLACE, IF EVERYONE WORKED AS HARD AS YOU DO, THINGS WOULD BE IN MUCH BETTER SHAPE, WOULDN’T THEY?

I MEAN – SERIOUSLY – DO YOU EVER HEAR SOMEONE SAY, *“YOU KNOW, WHEN I GO TO WORK, I JUST TRY TO GET BY DOING AS LITTLE WORK AS I POSSIBLY CAN. YOU WOULDN’T BELIEVE HOW HARD SOME OF THE REST OF THOSE FOLKS WORK. NOT ME, THOUGH! I TRY TO GET OUT OF AS MUCH WORK AS I POSSIBLY CAN!”*

NO ONE EVER SAYS THAT!

SO WHO IS IT, THEN, WHO’S NOT WORKING AS HARD AS EVERYONE ELSE?!

GO BACK AGAIN TO THAT ORDINATION QUESTION – *DO YOU SERVE THE PEOPLE WITH ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION & LOVE?*

AND WHAT ABOUT THE WORKLOAD IN THE FAMILY?

NOW MY INTENT IS NOT TO START ANY FAMILY SQUABBLES & I REALLY DON’T MEAN TO OVER-GENERALIZE OR BE SEXIST HERE.

BUT LET'S BE HONEST – MEN & CHILDREN OF THE FAMILY – WHAT IF YOUR WIFE OR YOUR MOTHER WORKED AS MUCH AS YOU DO AROUND THE HOUSE?

IT'S NOT A PLEASANT THOUGHT, IS IT?

ARE YOU REALLY GIVING ALL THAT YOU CAN?

ARE YOU PULLING YOUR FAIR SHARE OF THE LOAD?

OKAY, LET'S TURN TO PAUL'S PLACE OF EMPHASIS IN THIS PASSAGE – THE CHURCH.

HE TELLS THE CORINTHIANS & HE TELLS US THAT EVERYONE IS IMPORTANT.

“TO EACH IS GIVEN” SOMETHING FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH.

THERE IS NO JOB WITHIN THE CHURCH THAT IS OF GREATER OR LESSER IMPORTANCE THAN ANY OTHER.

HERE, THEN IS THE QUESTION – WHAT IF EVERYONE GAVE AS MUCH OF THEMSELVES WITHIN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH AS YOU DO?

SERIOUSLY.

THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A MOMENT.

THINK OF THE TIME YOU GIVE TO THE CHURCH.

THINK OF THE WAY YOU OFFER YOUR TALENTS.

THINK OF THE WAY YOU OFFER YOUR TREASURES.

WHAT IF EVERYONE IN THIS CHURCH FAMILY WAS AS COMMITTED AS YOU ARE.

WOULD WE BE BETTER OFF THAN WE ARE?

AND NOW THINK OF THIS – WHAT IF EVERYONE – EACH & EVERY ONE OF US - GAVE AS MUCH OF THEMSELVES AS THEY COULD POSSIBLY GIVE?

SOMEONE COMES TO MY MIND IN THIS REGARD – ESPECIALLY TODAY.

HE WAS THE KIND OF MAN FOR WHOM THE WORD “NO” SIMPLY DIDN'T EXIST.

HE WAS ASKED TO SERVE ON THE BOARD OF DEACONS.

HE SAID, “YES.”

HE WAS ASKED TO SERVE ON THE SESSION.

HE SAID, “YES.”

HE WAS ASKED TO SERVE ON THE TRUSTEES.

HE SAID, “YES.”

PERSONALLY, I TRIED MY LUCK WITH HIM.

“WILL YOU ORGANIZE SOME MEN TO COME TO THE CHURCH EVERY WEEK TO PREPARE THE NEWSLETTER?”

“YES.”

“WILL YOU TRY TO ROUND UP SOME MEN TO CREATE A WEEKLY MEN'S BREAKFAST?” “YES.”

“WILL YOU BE THE CLERK OF SESSION?” “YES.”

“CAN WE USE YOUR LAKE HOUSE FOR A STAFF RETREAT?” “YES.”

NOW, I MUST GO BACK & TELL YOU THAT I DO REMEMBER A TIME WHEN THIS MAN SAID “NO.”

“SINCE YOU’VE HAD A STROKE & ARE IN FAILING HEALTH & CONFINED TO A WHEELCHAIR & FIND IT DIFFICULT TO GET OUT & ABOUT, WILL THAT KEEP YOU FROM COMING TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY & WILL IT KEEP YOU FROM SERVING ON THE STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE THIS YEAR?”

THAT’S THE ONLY TIME I REMEMBER CHARLIE STRAEFFER SAYING “NO” TO ANYTHING I EVER ASKED HIM.

NOTHING SHORT OF DEATH ITSELF WOULD KEEP CHARLIE AWAY FROM HERE & DOING EVERYTHING HE COULD TO *SERVE THE PEOPLE WITH ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION & LOVE.*

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT WHAT THE CHURCH WOULD BE LIKE IF EVERYONE GAVE OF THEMSELVES AS MUCH AS THEY COULD POSSIBLY GIVE, CHARLIE STRAEFFER IS A PRETTY GOOD MODEL.

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE EXTRAORDINARY.

THE POTENTIAL THAT LIES WITHIN THESE WALLS AT THIS VERY MOMENT ARE ABSOLUTELY STAGGERING.

AS WE CELEBRATE THE BIRTHDAY OF THE REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. THIS WEEKEND, WE REMEMBER THAT HE ONCE SAID *“NOTHING IS MORE TRAGIC THAN FOR PEOPLE TO LET THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT GATHER DUST ON THE SHELF.”*

GOD HAS GIVEN YOU VERY SPECIAL & VERY UNIQUE GIFTS.

“TO EACH IS GIVEN.”

YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER THAT NO ONE ELSE CAN GIVE.

TAKE YOUR GIFT OFF THE SHELF & *“SERVE THE PEOPLE WITH ENERGY, INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION & LOVE.”* AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*