

**“No one in the bleachers; everybody on the field.”**

A Sermon Shared with St. Andrew's United Church  
on September 30, 2018 at 10:30 a.m.

Scripture Readings: Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27  
(Roger Pile)

This morning's message is about gifts. I personally have been blessed to have received many gifts. Scripture analysis, however, is not one of them. So my message today is based on a sermon I heard this summer at our daughter Elizabeth's church in California. The senior pastor there is John Ortberg and he led worship on August 12<sup>th</sup>.

My two siblings and I inherited our family cottage 10 years ago. This summer we began the process of selling our 67-year-old lake property and Anne and I have been spending the last two months getting it ready for sale. Now when I say the three of us own the cottage, I really mean that Anne and I look after it basically by ourselves. Annoyingly, there have been occasions when I have done a heroic "fix" without much acknowledgement from my siblings. "Wow that was amazing what you did this past week slaving away at in the heat and the bugs." "You must be a special person to give so much of your time for the old place." "You should be inducted into the "Cottage Fixing Hall of Fame." "I think you deserve ½ of my portion of the sale for all your work." Not so much. While I acknowledge that the work was done out of love for the family home and I got a great deal of satisfaction from "sprucing the place up," would a little over-the-top thanks have hurt? I mean, come on!!

Now I am sure that many in this congregation, while listening to my sad tale, would suggest that if I think that family life exists only for what I can get from it, I have been misinformed. Family is something you give to, more than get from. It is in the giving that you receive your reward...your gift.

We all have received gifts; things that we do well. The great question of life is..."Are you using your gifts?"

John Ortberg describes an incident from his recent past involving his grandmother. She was a woman of limited means, but she did save enough money each month to buy a beautiful china dish. Eventually, she had collected a complete set which she put away and saved for a special occasion. When she died, her husband found the dishes and asked John's mother whether she would like to have them. She had never seen these dishes and neither had anyone else in the family! The "special occasion" had never arrived, and so this beautiful treasure remained never seen and never used. To have a treasure like that and never use it, you might as well destroy it. (At this point John throws a dish on the floor and breaks it. He then explains that he did this for dramatic effect and assured us it wasn't one of his grandmother's dishes. I was going to try that this morning, but the dais is covered with carpet so it would lose a lot of the effect if it just bounced!)

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be [ignorant]." In other words, you have a gift that has been given to you by God through the Holy Spirit. Your decision is whether or not to use

your gift. God didn't call the Corinthians to just *attend* his church; God calls on members of his church family to *serve* his church. Here are some ideas to consider when you are thinking about serving.

1. *God created you to serve, not to be served.* Paul said, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." The creator gave us the gifts we need to serve his family.

In the ancient world God's family was served by priests. They were powerful people (men) who ruled not only the spiritual world but also the political one. Julius Caesar was not just Caesar, but also Pontius Maximus, the most high priest. When Jesus came along, he taught that everyone who follows him is a priest. This became known through the reformer Martin Luther as the "priesthood of all believers." Peter says, "...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."

In the early church, the term "minister" was never used to describe the church leaders. It referred to waiting on tables. It was a verb not a noun. Everybody ministered. No one in the bleachers...everyone in the game. If you are a follower of Jesus, then the Holy Spirit is in your life and has given you spiritual gifts which are to be used.

2. *God gave you gifts to enable you to serve.* The church was planned by God to be led by people who have the spiritual gift of leadership;

to be shepherded by people who have the spiritual gift of shepherding;

to be heard by people who have the spiritual gift of empathy;

to be inspired by people who have the spiritual gift of music;

to be welcomed by people who have the spiritual gift of hospitality;

to be nourished by people who have the spiritual gift of making muffins and coffee;

to be energized in a pleasing worship space by people who have the spiritual gift of decorating;

to have your car parked for you... Well you get the idea.

God's plan for his church is that it should be organized and operated according to the spiritual gifts of its people. Everyone has a role to play...everyone has a gift to bring.

Over time, however, the church has slipped back to empowering a "minister" to do the ministry. The minister's job would be to study the Bible, preach the Word, visit the shut-ins, pray for the sick, lead the Board, arrange the service, shepherd the flock, print the bulletin, recruit the volunteers, marry, bury, comfort, counsel, console, and fix the photocopier. Then, everybody else in the church would watch the minister do the ministry. That is not God's plan for his church.

(So...perhaps we should keep this in mind when we are thinking of asking our new minister to take on a job that the congregation could ably do itself.)

Everybody who follows Jesus has been given spiritual gifts. The best way to identify your spiritual gift, is to start serving and see how effectively God uses you.

3. *God changes you when you serve.* When you serve others, and think about them rather than about yourself, God changes you, and qualities like love, and humility, and compassion, and other-centeredness, grow in you. It sometimes seems like a burden to agree to serve, yet the act of service, seeing the results of using your gifts, leaves you feeling better than you felt before you served. It's like getting a sugar high without the calories!

4. *God uses you when you serve.* Paul says the church is actually the body or the presence of Christ on earth. As Donna read this morning, we are part of that body, and each part is needed for the health of the body. It is through serving that we discover what part of the body we are. You might be the ears (a good listener), or the spine (have courage to live your faith), or the mouth (sharing words of encouragement to others). There are no body parts or no persons that are not needed.

When people with gifts of help aren't helping, and those with gifts of encouragement aren't encouraging, when shepherds don't shepherd, or pray-ers don't pray or singers don't sing, or greeters don't greet or people with hospitality don't hospitalize, then the church doesn't work.

Paul says, I don't want you to be ignorant of your gifts. God wants us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. God created you to serve, God called you to serve, God gifted you to serve, God changes you when you serve. Find your place in the body of Christ. Nobody in the bleachers, everyone in the game. God's family needs you to serve, and you need you to serve.

We had a minister not so long ago who on occasion used sports analogies in his message. (Just...you know...sometimes!) I offer this analogy in honour of Bill. This summer, while passing through Sturgeon Falls, we noticed a sign on a church bulletin board. "Christianity is like the game of tennis. The one who spends the most time serving, usually wins."

Serve! Be a winner! Now about the coffee list for October...anyone??