

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

*<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

*<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.*

*<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.*

As you may remember if you were here or watching on Facebook Live, last Sunday we explored the topic of financial stewardship. We were challenged to consider our motivation for our giving and our reasons for not giving. We discovered that our giving should be closely linked to Jesus’ commandment to love our neighbors and not to guilt, selfishness or pride. Many of the same things can be said about the stewardship of our time and talents, which is what we are going to explore today.

Three boys in the schoolyard were bragging about who had the highest-paid father:

The first boy said, “My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a poem, and they give him \$100.”

The second boy said, “That’s nothing. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, he calls it a song, and they give him \$1000.”

The third boy said, “My Dad is even better than that. He scribbles a few words on a piece of paper, calls it a sermon, and it takes 6 or 8 men just to collect all the money!”

At the heart of this silly little story is not the issue of money, but who or what gifts or talents are more highly valued than others. The first part of this morning’s scripture from 1 Corinthians 12 speaks to this issue. The simple lesson we learn from this reading is that no person or talent is more highly valued than another by God.

Thinking about this in the context of the church and the ministries the church provides, no person is more important than another and no gift or talent is more valuable than another. Everyone and every talent are called out by God and needed to fulfill God's mission for the church. But there are, however, attitudes and motivations that sometimes get in the way of making these lessons a reality. And unfortunately, congregations who fail to embrace these lessons are challenged to thrive and fulfill the mission of helping to build God's kingdom.

I believe this is an exciting time for us even though we are still dealing with COVID-19 and the restrictions put on us and the ramifications that threaten. We have been forced to find ways to be church to each other and to be the light of Christ in our community. Some of what we have creatively come up with and implemented may be only temporary and other things like Facebook Live may be ongoing ministries we offer. But now is the time to look ahead. The question needs to be asked as it was asked last Sunday, but this time related to our time and talents. How will HCOB love our neighbors? And, how will you participate? Will we be good stewards of our God-given gifts?

What can we do to make sure we are good stewards of our God-given talents? One thing we want to do is encourage each other to value our individual talents. I think it goes without saying that we are not all the same nor do we all have the same capabilities. God didn't create us to be exactly the same.

Yet there are people who continuously compare themselves to others, telling themselves that their talents are nothing compared to someone else's talent. They lack confidence in themselves and their own abilities. Maybe they were told repeatedly by someone that they would never amount to anything, and now they believe it. They believe they have nothing to offer of any value, and if they did, they definitely would botch it and certainly not do it as well as someone else could do it. Do you believe in yourself and your capabilities?

Listen to these words from John 14:12-14.

*<sup>12</sup> Jesus is talking to his disciples. "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup> And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."*

These are awe-inspiring words from Jesus. Did you catch who Jesus said will do "greater things"? Jesus said believers will actually be able to participate in his work and do even greater things. Jesus doesn't give qualifications for doing this work, like whether you are a man or woman...or even a pastor. No one is excluded.

Tara Beth Leach, in her book, *Emboldened, A Vision for Empowering Women for Ministry*, wrote the following thought-provoking reflections on this text:

*"Jesus, says, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do. We, then, as sons and daughters of the King will participate in the mission of God in this world through miracles, teaching, preaching, prophesying, evangelizing, caring for the sick, radical acts of love, and laying down our lives for others. By believing in Jesus, by being so united with him through the Spirit, we will bear witness to the world about Jesus – the world will see Jesus in us through our work.*

*"This is all awesome and astonishing on so many levels, but here's what I want you to get: Just as we believe in Jesus, so Jesus believes in us."*

Yes, "Jesus believes in you." Maybe it's time to pause for a moment, take a deep breath, and allow those words to soak into your heart. "Jesus believes in you."

Jesus believes in you, Jesus is with you, and Jesus will equip you. If you don't yet, you need to begin to believe that he believes in you, and you need to believe in yourself. If God has given you the talent, he believes you can do it on your own, no matter where you are and together with your church family through the ministries of the church. HCOB needs you. Jesus needs you to believe in yourself and step up to help with God's work.

Some of us need some help from our brothers and sisters in Christ—help to believe in ourselves, help to recognize our giftedness, help to find confidence in ourselves, help to take a risk. We as the church can and should do that for each other.

I was very much one of those people who lacked confidence in my abilities. It's funny. I always knew I was being called to some kind of ministry, but I just didn't value my talents and I lacked confidence to even try. I was the congregant that sat in Sunday School without saying a word, even though I had thoughts and opinions. I didn't get involved in anything at church except attending Sunday School and worship.

That began to change because of something Pastor Ralph Moyer did to encourage me. It began at a weekend marriage enrichment Don and I attended. Ralph and his wife Annette led the retreat. For the Sunday closing worship, Ralph wanted all of us to share something of our own choosing with the group. I decided I was going to sing a song by Whitecross called, "I'm Yours"—or something like that. I had never sung in front of people before, but that day I did.

Sometime later, I joined the choir. We were rehearsing one evening and the choir director was looking for someone to sing a solo for the one song we were doing. I wasn't about to volunteer; but good old Ralph, apparently remembering that I sang at our marriage enrichment worship, announced to the choir director that he thought I should do the solo. I honestly don't know why I consented to do it, but I did.

When the Sunday came for me to sing the solo, I was shaking like a leaf and it didn't go very well, but it broke the ice for me. I was more willing to try new things and express my thoughts and ideas. I got more involved in helping with the ministries of the church. All it took was one person in my church family believing in me and helping me to believe in myself.

The Bible tells us to build one another up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up..." And Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

And, here in the scripture that was read to us this morning, it essentially tells us the same thing. Did you hear it in verses 20 and 21? Listen again, "As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" Everyone is needed, AND we should be encouraging and helping one another to believe in themselves, to believe they have God-given talents, to believe they have something valuable to contribute.

The church's ability to dream and put into motion God's plan can be and will be stifled by attitudes and conducts within the body motivated by pride, selfish ambition, and possessiveness; or by unjustly stereotyping and judging someone to be "different"—whatever that means...as being incapable of doing—let alone leading—a certain task. No one person (not even the pastor), no one group, no one family runs the church deciding what the church will do and telling who gets to help with what. There are churches where this is a huge problem, and they are dying. It's sad, so very sad.

So, HCOB, how will we show our love? Of course, it all begins with loving God and being in tune with his will and having a passion for others to know they are loved by God. My hope, prayers, and vision for showing our love to each other, to our community and even to our world begins with listening to God's voice, capturing dreams and visions of ministries that share our love, believing in ourselves, building one another up, and **everyone** working together.

On this second stewardship Sunday, your leadership team wants to encourage you to consider how you might help HCOB share God's love through our work together. The Spiritual Nurture Team put together these helpful surveys for you. Each of you should have one in your bulletin. I would like you to pull that out right now and take a few moments to fill it out and drop it in the offering plate before you leave. We are not asking for information about what you already do in the programs of the church, but instead, what interests you? Where do you see you could use your gifts to extend God's love to others?