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EXODUS 31:1-11
ROMANS 12:1-8

“SHARE YOUR GIFTS”

The main point of this sermon is that when we treasure and root ourselves in the mercies of God, we can use our gifts with humility and the sole purpose of serving our brothers and sisters in building up the church.

The Right Foundation

When we reach certain age, our parents gave me fewer rules. When we're children we ask whether we can go outside and play, but no one in college should call their parents and ask whether they can go out with friends to get pizza.¹ And so, there might be fewer rules, but that doesn't mean expectations are lowered. In fact, expectations increase as we pass out of childhood, don't they?

And so, what happens over time is that parents start saying things like, “Remember what we taught you. Remember how you were raised; know that we love you.”

In a way, this is what Paul is doing as he begins this new section of his letter. You see, the final chapters spell out how the Christians in Rome are to live out their faith in the world. He has incredibly high expectations for them. But it's important to see how he goes about this. What is the foundation of this new life? A list of rules? Not at all.

He appeals to them “by the mercies of God.” And we can say that everything Paul has written in the first eleven chapters of this great letter can be summed up as the mercies of God. Paul tells us “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” but we are “now justified by his [God's] grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). And Paul assures us that there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). When we put it all together, we see that because of the mercies of God shown to us in Christ, the penalty of sin has been paid, and the power of sin has been broken. Because of the mercies of God, we aren't simply let-off-the-hook. It's far more than that. We are declared innocent of all our sins before God's throne of judgment. It's not that the guilty just get to go free, but that the guilty are declared perfectly righteous all on account of God's mercy.

And so, when Paul begins to lay out what it looks like to live the Christian life, he's saying, ‘Build it all on the sturdy and trustworthy foundation of God's mercies.’ This isn't a list of rules to win God's favor. And the truth about keeping rules is that we can do so without yielding our lives to God. But when we treasure the mercies of God, the only sensible thing to do is yield it all

¹ I heard this illustration from Tim Keller but do not recall the exact source.

to God. That's why Paul calls for us to present our bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy and acceptable to God.

And Paul's point is that considering God's mercies toward us, this is the only logical and reasonable thing to do. It is our "spiritual [reasonable or true] worship." And we should ask, why does Paul bring up "worship" here?

You see, at the beginning of this letter, Paul says that our fundamental sin is that we do not worship God (cf. Rom. 1:18-32). And by not worshipping or honoring God, we are doing the most foolish and irrational thing of all. And by failing to worship and honor God, we have spiraled into darkness. Our thinking has become senseless. Our minds have rejected God's will to our own demise and destruction. But now, because of the mercies of God, Paul is saying that the way for us to truly worship God with the entirety of our lives has been reopened. Through God's mercies, transformation is underway. Minds are being renewed and brought out of darkness, so we can look upon God's will and see that it is "good and acceptable and perfect."

Humility and Sober Judgment

Now, what exactly does that look like? How do we recognize true transformation? And how do we know our minds are being renewed? I think Paul gives us an idea of what this looks like in verse 3 when he says, "I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."

You see, the renewal of your mind means that pride will be rooted out of your life – you won't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. If your whole life is built upon the foundation of God's mercies, how in the world can pride still have a place in your heart? How can you go about thinking you're the center of all things?

And if pride is rooted out of your life, what comes in its place? Humility. And Paul's logic is that humility leads us to "think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." So, what in the world does Paul mean by "the measure of faith that God has assigned?"

Commentators take different positions, but I think what Paul is saying is that the most important way we view ourselves is by our faith in Christ. How we measure ourselves should be according to who Christ is for us and what he has accomplished on our behalf. And think about what this does.

Generally, when we dwell on ourselves, people find themselves in one of two destinations. Some inflate with pride. All they see are their wins and successes and how much better they're doing than others. On the other hand, some fall into despair. All they see are their mistakes and how much better everyone else seems to be doing. And what Paul is saying is that viewing yourself in Christ destroys both pride and despair. Pride is out because you remember your life depends on God's mercy. You stood guilty before God, but your sins were pardoned. Despair is out because God loves you so much, he has showered the fullness of his mercies upon you. You aren't a

guilty sinner deserving death but a child of God with an eternal inheritance. And when pride and despair are out of your life, you are free to make the most of Christ in your life.

Proper Functioning of the Body

And what Paul is telling us here is that making the most of Christ in your life means serving the body of Christ with the gift or gifts you've received from God. And before Paul runs through his list of different gifts, he makes two important points.

First, no one will ever possess enough gifts to sustain the body on their own. That's why we approach our service in humility – no one can carry the load on their own. Trying to do so is a subtle form of pride. And the body becomes dysfunctional when members take on work, they aren't equipped to perform.

But, it's also true, the body becomes dysfunctional when members refrain from doing work they are equipped to do. Perhaps, some look upon themselves and conclude they don't have anything to give, because they don't look like the people whose gifts are very visible. Remember, mercy does away with despair and thoughts of worthlessness. God gives to each member a function within the body.

Think about how ridiculous Moses would have looked trying to do the work Bezalel and Oholiab were called to do. And think about how dysfunctional things would have been if Bezalel and Oholiab had decided to spend their time trying to do Moses' work.

Using Gifts

This is Paul's point: "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." And when Paul reaches his list of gifts in verses 6-8, he tells us how we should go about using our gifts.

But what's interesting is that verses 6-8 lack a main verb, which is why our translations supply one. So, what Paul is saying is this, 'If anyone has the gift of ministry or service, let him use it in his ministry or in serving. The one who teaches in his teaching; the one who exhorts in his exhortation.' Isn't that redundant? Why emphasize that someone should use their teaching gift in teaching? Where else do you use a teaching gift?

Paul's point is that we should strive to excel in the gifts we've received. It doesn't mean that we are exempt from things like generosity or showing mercy. Instead, Paul encourages each us to pursue our gift with energy and concentration and passion. And we can't excel and grow, if we're trying to do it all. Give yourself the freedom to pursue something with great devotion. I believe that's one way we discover our spiritual gifts. We ask ourselves what excites us. What brings you joy? Where do you want to spend your time? Of course, even in the things we enjoy we encounter frustrations and setbacks. But, if we are pursuing work that is aligned with our set of gifts, we will be able to endure hardships and setbacks.

And notice, Paul makes a shift in the last three gifts. He doesn't say, 'The one who gives in giving; the leader in leading; the compassionate in compassion.' He says, 'The one who gives *in*

generosity; the one who leads *in zeal*; the one who shows compassion *in cheerfulness*. Why make this shift?

Well, it is important to use our gifts, but Paul is saying that the way we use them is equally important. Our attitude matters. What good does it do the church when someone gives out of spirit of resentment? Or someone leads with a spirit of sloth? Or shows compassion out of a sense of guilt? All these things spoil the gift. So, if you know you have a certain spiritual gift, don't ruin it with your attitude.

And so, what's the key to making all this work? How do we as Trinity use our spiritual gifts as the body of Christ? Couple of practical things to consider. Look around for areas of need. Not all of us are aware of the same things, so if you see an area of need, whether big or small, there's a good chance you have the gift to address the need. Ask people who know you well about your gifts. For whatever reason, sometimes we overlook the obvious. Know that it's okay to take a risk and try something. Don't be paralyzed with fear. Trust that God will reveal to you if this is an area of giftedness. And ask people to join you. You don't have to do things alone.

But above all things, treasure the mercies of God. The Christian life begins with the mercies of God, and we keep on in the Christian life by growing in these same mercies. Through these mercies, we can move out of pride and despair. And freed from both pride and despair, we can work to exalt the name of Christ. We won't be concerned about personal recognition or weighed down by feeling inferior. We won't live under the burden of trying to earn God's favor. Instead, we will live in freedom for God and for one another.

Yes, God gives us spiritual gifts to build up the church. But none of our spiritual gifts are the foundation. The foundation is Christ. He's the difference. He transforms men and women. You see, all of us need the grace only Christ can share. No other spiritual gift can accomplish what Christ has done through his sacrificial service on the cross.

He has brought us from death to life; from unholiness to holiness; from condemnation to acceptance. Those are the wonderful mercies of God that free us to serve one another with humility and a passion to show how much our lives have been changed by the one who came to serve us (cf. Mark 10:45).

Amen.