

Improving Our Serve, Part 2
Romans 12:1-8, Psalm 139:1-16

Rev. Lynell M. Caudillo
September 30, 2018

Previously we considered the first two verses of Romans 12. Based on the amazing mercies that our loving God has lavished upon us, Paul urges us to worship and serve God whole-heartedly. In fact, we are urged to offer our bodies in sacrificial worship and service.

Our corporate worship is expressed weekly in our participatory liturgy, music, prayers and preaching. But that alone would not satisfy Paul. *For Paul, worship is "full-bodied". It happens in community as we live out our faith by serving one another, to build up the body of Christ. The quality of our worship is not measured by what happens on only Sunday mornings, but by what happens when we are together Monday through Saturday.* (Elizabeth Shively http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2101)

Our gratitude for God's mercies, and our worship is also expressed in how we live our lives--individually and corporately—24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

By the way, listen as I read for the words "grace", "gift", "give". All are derivatives of "charis" (charisma/charismata) and share the identical root word in Greek. In this passage, there are more than eight uses of this root word.

Read Scripture: Romans 12:1-8 NIV

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a]faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give

encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (PRAY)

I've been a life-long fan of the Peanuts comic strip. I love Charlie Brown, perhaps because he represents the struggles of ordinary people. He tries so hard—at baseball. He's a loser. At football—he never learns that Lucy is nothing, if not reliable. She **will** pull that ball out from under him! And he's a loser in love—the little red-haired girl does not even know that he exists. It's safe to say, he struggles with low self-esteem.

One of my favorite strips, portrays Charlie Brown, tucked into bed. The moon can be seen through his bedroom window, shining in the dark night sky. Charlie muses:

“Sometimes I lie awake at night and ask ‘Where have I gone wrong?’; then a voice says to me: ‘This is going to take more than one night’.”

It would not be far-fetched to think that some, if not all, of us have struggled with self-esteem.

In v. 3-8 which is our focus today, Paul instructs us regarding how we are think about ourselves, and two, how we are to think about the gifts that God gives us.

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you

How do we measure our self-esteem? From the day we are born, we receive messages (verbal, non-verbal, etc.) from parents, other family members, teachers, friends, acquaintances and even strangers. Some feedback we receive is positive, some is negative, and some is inaccurate.

If we give any credence to media today, few of us can ever be as rich, as skinny, wrinkle-free, or physically fit as Madison Avenue would have us be. One must drive the right vehicle, use the right detergent, deodorant, perfume, makeup, clothing, and possess the perfect smile and the latest technology.

If one is lacking any of these things one could believe that one is "less than" acceptable. They are selling and we are buying a lot of lies!

Where are we to find reliable source of feedback about who we really are, about what and how we are to think about ourselves? God's word!

First, we are created in God's image and pronounced "very good" (Genesis 1:31) Start there with the first words spoken about you and me.

The Psalmist declares that God knows us intimately, and that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139: 14)

God's word also tells us that we are sinners (this is a reality check!) Paul tells us in Chapter 5 of Romans:

⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

The cross represents a reality check: We are sinners, loved sinners. God chooses to close the gap between us and God with the Cross. We are highly valued by our Creator and Savior! **You** are so loved!! You **are** so loved! You are **so** loved! You are so **loved!** (Do you believe that???)

You are familiar with John 3:16 NIV

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Hear that verse with your own name in the place of the word "world". Wow.

You and I matter to God. That is a self-esteem booster!

The degree to which we accept and **believe what God has said about us**, to that degree we will possess sound judgement about ourselves.

In fact, one of the first consequences of "being transformed by the renewing of our minds" (v. 2) is a new self-understanding. (J. Edwards, Romans, p. 286)

The Holy Spirit of God acts, if you will, as a spiritual midwife during the process of our coming to faith, and bringing us into a relationship with God. So you can be assured that if you have faith, you also are filled with the Spirit of God.

Therefore, Paul's point is that in having "sober judgement" about ourselves, we take all of this into consideration...and realize that yes, even faith, is a

gift which God imparts to us. Faith—forgiveness--salvation--the Love of God--all of these are gifts of God for the people of God!

The appropriate response is to receive this gift with gratitude and humility, and to live sacrificially (v.1-2). These are appropriate responses to the "grace given to us" (v.3).

**4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,
5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.**

This metaphor of the body and its various parts is familiar to us. (Paul expounds on it in greater detail in I Cor 12.) The idea being that while we are one body in Christ, each one is essential, an integral part of the whole. However, each one is unique and different. We need one another.

An advertising campaign on television for Google's Android telephone, features a young musician playing Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. As his fingers fly over the keys, this caption appears: **"A piano has 88 keys."** Then, **"Each one is different."**

The third caption reads: **"But what if they were all the same?"**

With that, the pianist switches to an identical piano and continues to play. However, regardless of the key played, every note on the reengineered piano plays the same note—a middle C. The pianist alternates between the two pianos until the final frame, where the caption reads: **"Be together, not the same."** (Youtube, "Android Monotune")

This illustrates Paul's point in this passage; each believer is given a different gift, a different "note to play". Without you—the sonata will not be complete! Every person, every gift, is essential to the whole.

Three weeks ago on Sept. 9th, our Jubilee Anniversary year culminated with a wonderful worship service, with special guests, followed by a delicious catered luncheon. Each month during the previous year, a special event or activity happened, in commemoration of CPC's 125 years of worship and service here on the plateau.

That did not happen by magic! It happened because of prayer, and the wisdom and skill of Jane Dursteler and her team. She made 25 phone calls asking for help. And, amazingly, 25 people said "YES"!

Yes—I'll help with a new pictorial directory. Yes—I'll help with a church cookbook—a book honoring our Veteran's—a Mission retrospective—a slide

presentation on CPC's history—a Lenten devotional—a musical concert—a so much more!

Twenty-five individuals said "YES—I will use my time, my talent, my skill, my gifts in the service of God and this congregation!"

Not one person said, "No!"

That is remarkable. Or is it? I think Jane is a very wise woman. She asked people to engage in tasks that they enjoyed doing. Each person played to their strengths, and used their best gifts. AND, how well served all of US were!! (No complaints from them, OR from us!!)

This is exactly how God intends for the church to work! "Be together, not the same!"

"The human body is not a unity *despite* its diversity, but a unity *because* of it. So it is with us, the church. In God's economy, self-understanding comes only through the "inner" connectedness of believers." The many members are freed from competing with one another, and set free to complement one another. (J.Edwards, p. 286-87)

How boring it would be if we were all the same! God, who is infinitely creative and the author of endless possibilities, does not use a "cookie cutter" approach! No, God has seen to it that each one of us is unique. Each one of us brings something special to the whole, our lives are enriched when everyone participates

6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Do you enjoy giving and receiving gifts?

Sometimes gift-giving can be challenging...it depends, in part, on one's budget (hard to reciprocate if we have received a lavish gift and feel obligated to respond in kind.)

Also it can be challenging to find something with a specific person in mind. If the recipient's likes and dislikes are known, it can be easier.

*"One size fits all/most" kinds of gifts are impersonal. **The gifts that mean the most to us--both in the giving and receiving--reflect some thoughtfulness on the part of the giver, and knowledge of the recipient.***

When my nephew graduated from high school, I made him a quilt. Knowing that Carson has a passion for music and played guitar in a jazz band, I searched for a found some great black and white fabrics with musical motifs and went to work. Both of us were pleased with the quilt. Better yet, now he is in his late twenties and moved recently from California to Minnesota for his first corporate job, post Masters' degree.

While packing his car for the cross country move, he had to make the tough decision to leave many possessions behind, to be shipped later. However, it warmed my heart to hear that the quilt made the trip and is now gracing his new bed in his new apartment!

There are several passages in the New Testament where there are "lists" or "categories" of spiritual gifts. While these are certainly helpful in giving us a starting place, however, these lists are incomplete.

I believe that God gives specific gifts for certain times and places, as they are needed by the church. This is consistent with the idea that "one size does NOT fit all" persons, all situations, all cultures, etc. We shall be learning more about these as we focus on "Improving Our Serve" for the remainder of this month.

Meanwhile, remember: Whenever your self-esteem may be taking a hit, never forget that you are God's beloved. You and I are beloved by God, and gifted in order to serve God, and to build up the body of Christ. As the ad said: "Be together, not the same."

Let's pray...

In addition to this passage in Romans 12, you can read more about them in I Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4 :7-16 and 2 Timothy 1:6-7, I Peter 4:10-11.