

“DARING FAITH: III – DARING TO USE THE GIFTS
THAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU”

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I Corinthians 12:12-31

I am not a fisherman, or a fisherwoman, or however you want to say it. I think the last time I went fishing was probably easily at least thirty years ago. That wasn't always the case though. When I was really young, and we moved here to Elkton, I remember walking from our house in Elkwood Estates somewhere to a creek nearby and fishing with bamboo fishing poles with a string and hook on them. That was when I was really young – elementary school age.

Then during all of the summer vacations we took as a family to Cayuga Lake in New York, I did a little fishing there as well. But truth be told, putting icky worms on hooks was gross, so I made my father or brothers do that, and then, if I miraculously happened to catch a fish, I made them take it off the hook as well. And goodness knows, I didn't eat anything I caught.

I think probably what did it for me in terms of fishing, though, was the fact that my brothers, and probably the two youngest – Adam and John – would chase me with the fish, knowing how grossed out I was by them.

So, you see, I really am not a fisherman – at least in terms of fishing for fish. But when it comes to other kinds of fishing – especially the kind of fishing Jesus has called me to do, well that's something else entirely. I'm all in there!

Did you ever wonder why Jesus chose fisherman as some of his first disciples? They certainly weren't on anyone's best-dressed list, or community leaders or sought after speakers. They were fisherman, going about life quietly day in and day out loading their boats with nets, going out onto the water, and hour by hour, day by day, doing their jobs – providing fish so that others might have food.

So why would Jesus go to them, and choose so many of them to be by his side as he started his ministry? Well, think about it. What makes for a good fisherman? They need to be of hearty stock, for surely fisherman go fishing in all sorts of weather and conditions. They need to be physically strong, strong enough to pull up a net full of fish. They need to be infinitely patient, for sometimes they go long periods without catching anything, yet they never giuiiiiiiiiyy0-----
-----ve up. All traits, when you think about it,

that would make for good disciples – strength, patience and persistence! Gifts each of them had been given by God.

By all indications, all of them were doing okay at the fisherman business. Nowhere do we hear that they were dissatisfied and looking for a new way to make a living. But Jesus comes along and offers them just that – actually not a way to make a living, but a way to make a life.

He offered them a way to take the unique gifts that God had given them and to use them for the sake of the Kingdom of God. He basically said to them that the gifts they used in fishing would be the very same gifts that would make them successful fishing for people for the kingdom. And they answered his call, and left their boats that day to follow him on what would be a short, but incredible journey together.

They left that place and went on the road with him – watching him, learning from him, being challenged by him. They began to teach, and heal and tell anyone who would listen about Jesus. They went out in all forms of weather, which was nothing for them who had fished through rain, and wind, and storms of all kind. They were endlessly patient as people came to understand who Jesus was – a patience learned in boats waiting for fish to show up in their nets. And yet they were persistent, too, with their urgent message to people to come to know the Lord of life – a persistence learned from going back out day after day after day to haul in fish.

God had uniquely gifted each of them, and the gifts they used in their, let's say "secular" lives, Jesus now invited them to use in a "sacred" way – that the kingdom of God might grow, which they did, with him and for him, for three years.

Then came the time when Jesus knew the end was near, that he would no longer be with them on this earthly journey, and so in a very profound and meaningful way he reminded them how important it was for them to continue on in the same way even after he was gone. How? He knelt down in front of each of them and washed their feet – performed this lowly servant task with love and compassion on each of them. And when he was finished he said, "Now you do the same thing, you serve others, because as you do, they will remember me."

And so they did. From the time Jesus called them, to the time they died, almost to a man, they dared to use the gifts God had given them for the work of the kingdom. It wasn't always easy, most assuredly, and it wasn't always comfortable, but it was what God called them to do, and they said "yes" when Jesus called them to do it.

What about you? Are you using the gifts God has given you for the work of his kingdom? Don't be intimidated by the fact that I'm saying you have gifts just like the gifts of the disciples. But the fact is, you do.

In his best-selling book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Pastor Rick Warren talks about each of us and our gifts. He writes, "Each of us was uniquely designed by God with talents, gifts, skills, and abilities. God didn't give you abilities for selfish purposes. They were given to benefit others just as others were given abilities for your benefit."

He continues: "You were put on earth to make a contribution. You weren't created just to consume resources – to eat, breathe, and take up space. God designed you to make a difference with your life." (Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, p. 227)

Have you figured out what that is? Have you thought about the gifts God has given you and how you can use them for the sake of the kingdom? And are you doing that? Are you daring to do that?

You know, it's not as difficult and overwhelming as we make it out to be. It's simply using the gifts you naturally have in way that is pleasing and helpful to God and others. And your gifts are as valuable as anyone else's. There are no more important or less important gifts – all are important in the eyes of God.

I actually want to read you something else that Rick Warren said about using whatever gifts we have in service to Christ that made me smile. He wrote, "There are no insignificant ministries in the church. Some are visible and some are behind the scenes, but all are valuable. Small or hidden ministries often make the biggest influence. In my home (he continues), the most important light is not the large chandelier in our dining room, but the little night light that keeps me from stubbing my toe when I get up at night." (Ibid, p. 230)

So if you don't think your gifts light up like a chandelier, don't worry, your little night light gift is just as important, just as needed.

Let me tell you a few stories about people and their gifts. One is actually pretty funny, and it might actually be a gift that some of you have!

It's a gift borne by a woman, who one day went to the airport to pick up her two daughters who were coming home from college. Traffic was terrible that day, and there was a huge backup at the incoming terminal where she was to meet the girls. When she was about a block away from the door where they were going to exit, the traffic was stopped dead. All of a sudden she looks up and sees the girls come out of the terminal, but they're a block away and she's stuck. So she gets out of her car, and at the top of her lungs shouts, "Alice! Kathy!" Their heads spun

around as they heard her shout, and they came running toward her, to be greeted with great big hugs when they got there. They started to load their bags in the trunk, when the man in the car behind them got out and said to the woman, “Lady, would you mind calling for Harold?” Now that’s a gift! I know that might seem silly, but she used that gift that day to help somebody else. You see what I mean – we make this “using our gifts” thing harder than it needs to be.

There was another person, a man, who was on disability because of an injury he suffered in military service. There were lots of things he couldn’t do in the church, but one of the things he started to do was drive around the perimeter of the parking lot cleaning it up. He would check the doors and windows of the church to make sure they were locked, and then one day, he decided it would be nice to help people in the parking lot. He would greet them when they got out of their cars and help them with things they were bringing inside. When it was raining, and he saw a woman coming in by herself, he would offer to park her car. He got to know all of the children and youth coming in and called them by name every week, and pretty soon, he started getting others to help him do that. And pretty soon, his church started something that our church has done as well – Knights in Shining Armour – a parking lot greeting crew! It all started in that church, with one man, who though he thought he didn’t have gifts the church really needed, actually had some they badly needed and called others to use theirs as well.

You see, friends, these two people just used the gifts they had – as simple and plain as they thought they were. So if you haven’t dared to use your gifts because you thought you didn’t have anything special to offer – think again! You do!

Jesus’ dare is for you to find a way to use them – now! What are your gifts? Do you have the gift of music? Sing in the choir, or ring in the handbells. Do you have the gift of showing others how to do things? Help with Sunday School, or youth group, or Scouts. Do you like to teach? Teach a short-term study, or be a part of a team to teach Sunday School. Do you knit or do other handwork? Join the Dorcas Circle or make something for the Mitten Tree? Are you good with numbers? Help the counting team. Do you have the gift of hospitality? If you do, there are a zillion ways you can use that gift here – as a greeter, or an usher, serving as a host or hostess for the coffee hour, working the Welcome Center, being part of the parking lot crew – the list goes on and on! Are you a strong administrator? Perhaps you could work on a committee in the church. Do you have skills like plumbing or electrical work or construction? Offer your services to the Trustees or the Missions or Christmas in April teams? Do you like to read? Be a mentor at Thomson Estates. Are you a good writer? Write notes to people who need a little TLC. Are you a good speaker? Read the Gospel lesson for us.

Have I hit on your gift yet? Well even if I didn't I hope you get the idea. No matter what your gift, there's a place for you to use it for the sake of the kingdom. Dare to do that! Dare to use the gifts God has given you. As Rick Warren said, God didn't give you those gifts to sit on them, He needs you to use them, and He wants you to use them.

In some ways, daring to give the gift of money, which you're pledging to do today, might be easier for you than giving the gift of yourself. But if it's a challenge for you, ask God to give you the strength you need to say yes, "I will share my gift with others," and then just take the first step. And if you don't know how to start, come and see me – I'll be glad to help you out.

My friends, I invite all of us to keep ever before us the vision of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, and to remember that that's what he wants us to do as well – serve others by using our gifts – for as we do, they will remember him. So dare to use the gifts God has given you! Who knows how many lives you will touch for Jesus as you do? May it be so.

Amen.