

Laity Sunday

October 16, 2016

"Centered Living in an Off-Centered World" - How I Use My Time and Gifts

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Genesis 12:1-3

Matthew 5:13-16

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter 4:10 NIV)*

Rick Warren, pastor at Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA wrote in his sermon titled Make The Most of Your Talents the following words:

"God has given you unique abilities, talents, and gifts; they represent a person's SHAPE – Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experiences. This bundle of talents is the thing God has given you that makes you who you are and sets you apart from other people. You are shaped to serve God, whether you are a musician or an accountant, a teacher or a cook, God gave you those abilities to serve others."

"You are a manager of the gifts God has given to you they may be great or small in your eyes, but they matter to God. When God gives you a talent, he expects you to use it. It's like a muscle. If you use it, it will grow. If you don't, you'll lose it. Are you using what He's given you for the benefit of others to make the world a better place? Or are you hoarding your talents for yourself?"

In the neighborhood I grew up in, there were two houses next to each other, one was dark and creepy, the other had lights that shined so bright it lit the whole street. The dark house was owned by a man you never saw, he did not socialize with neighbors, and he kept to himself. The brightly lit house was filled with light and laughter, the family was always friendly with neighbors and shared their gifts with others. I remember getting off the school bus and Mr. Light would stop me and say, "Garden is overflowing with vegetables, here take a bag home to your family." Mr. Light would share his bounty with all the neighbors, in turn the neighborhood would give back to them. My Mom would make jelly or cookies and we would share it with the Light family. The Light Family would host neighborhood gatherings and they were always willing to give a helping hand. I cannot count the many times I was in Light's house, for summer picnics, Christmas parties or just playing basketball in their driveway.

The Dark house was very quiet, lonely and sad. Over time the yard became overgrown that when you walked past the property, it was hard to tell there was a house still there. Some years later Mr. Dark passed away, and the son of the Light family bought Mr. Dark's house. The Light's son immediately started clearing the property, discovering there were six cars plus a two story house packed full of stuff. The cars were stuffed full of shopping bags of unused items; the house had a single path through it and every room was full from floor to ceiling with stuff. This house would have qualified for the show Hoarders.

The light's son said as he was cleaning out the house he would find scraps of paper with very small writing covering every inch of the paper. He made a joke saying that the cure for cancer was probably written on those papers. Mr. Dark could have had the cure for cancer or solved global warming but he did not share his gifts with others; he took his light and put it under a bushel basket not to be seen by the world.

Mr. Light on the other hand put his light on a stand for everyone to share, his light shined so bright that it made the world a better place. Mr. Light also passed away just a year ago, but his light is still shining. It shines within his family, within his neighbors and within me every day. Mr. Light, just like Abraham, was a blessing to all the families in his great nation.

Are you hiding your gifts? Are you thinking, others can do so many things better than I can. I don't have any real talent or gifts that I can use in God's work. Let somebody else do it.

Your gifts are special and God gave you these gifts to share. By sharing our gifts and talents we are blessed, our lives are rich and we receive back what we have given.

None of us, not even the ones most committed to Jesus Christ, see ourselves clearly and accurately. That is why we place ourselves under spiritual leaders and in the company of fellow Christians. Often others see our spiritual usefulness more clearly than we see it ourselves.

Earlier we heard from two people and how they began using their gifts. As for me, I was asked to be a member on Staff Parish Relations, then to lead a Sunday School class, and I joined a bible study. In the bible study is where my eyes were opened to sharing the Lord's word. I know that I am not the best public speaker; I get nervous and stutter, but I know that the Lord has filled me with a message to share. Standing here, giving today's sermon really is a stretch for me. I would much rather be the person walking around giving orders; turn on the lights, start the music, cue the pastor. I am an excellent director, I have been telling people what to do since I began talking, just ask my Mom. But sometimes we need to step out of comfort zone and stretch ourselves for the Lord.

Scripture tells us that to be God's people means to do God's work. We must be distinctive, unique, a people set apart. Today's Gospel Matthew 5:13, reminds us just how different from the world we must be. Jesus taught, "You are the salt of the earth". What does this phrase mean? Our uniqueness is a sign of God's work. Our saltiness is symbol and seal of what God is doing through us to save a lost world.

In Jesus' time, salt was used as a preservative; it was spread all over meat to draw moisture out, to prevent bacteria from growing. As the salt of the earth, we are called to preserve the world. By doing God's work we create an environment where bacteria (evil) has no place to grow. God has given us the tools, our unique gifts, to do the work. It's up to us to use these gifts.

Jesus said, You "Are" The Salt You "Are" The Light! The scripture does not state you could be the salt or the light. It does not say you should be the salt and the light. It says you "are". It is a promise!

How are you using your gifts and talents? Today the Stewardship committee is hosting the stewardship fair in Welden Hall. There are many opportunities for you to share your gifts and talents. If you can swing a hammer, the mission's team wants you. If you are a baker or crafter, there's a group who needs your talent. If you are good with computers and technology, the Tech Team is looking for you. The spaghetti dinner is coming up and they need servers. There are many committees and groups who are stewards of our church, there are committees and groups that work in our community and there are groups that work with our children and youth. It takes many hands to do God's work. By using our gifts and talents for God's work we are centered in an off-centered world.

In the beginning God called Abraham and Sarah to be a pilgrim people, to bring blessing to the world. We are also called by God to continue this legacy.

God has wrapped up a gift for you, and there is a gift that God has wrapped up in you too. Please, go to the Stewardship fair today and unwrap your gift, to be shared, let your light shine.