

May 26, 2019

Strangers in this World

"To God's elect, strangers in the world..."

I Peter 1:1

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."

I Peter 4:10-11

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good...The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."

I Corinthians 12:4-18

As disciples we have been added to the body of Christ, the church. As you have often heard me say, 'church is not a place we go, but who we are all of the time.' No matter where I go and no matter what I am doing, as a disciple I am called to be functioning as a part of the body of Christ.

As a part or member of that body I have been given specific gifts, talents and abilities which I am charged to use in service to others. Peter would say, ***"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."*** And the Apostle Paul would add, ***"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good"*** in his letter to the Corinthian believers.

So each and every one of us sitting in this room this morning has been gifted by God with talents and abilities which were given to us by His Spirit so that through them we could serve others and in doing so bring glory to God. Simply 'going to church' is not now, nor has it ever been our primary function as disciples.

As those who follow Jesus discovering our gifts, and putting those gifts to work has to be central to our walk. Discovering our gifts is really not a challenging task, but it does take a measure of personal honesty. Paul would tell the believers in Rome, ***"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but rather think of your self with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."*** (Romans 12:3)

So, discovering our place in the function of the church begins with an honest, personal stock-taking. What gifts, talents and abilities do you and I possess? What can we do? To suggest that we have no gifts, no talents, or no abilities is to deny the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If we are God's chosen people, his royal priesthood, as Peter tells us we are; then God has given us talents and abilities to use in His service.

When we identify those things that we can do, then we must, of course, choose to do them. Again, using our gifts in service is who we are called to be. We cannot choose not to serve and still claim to be disciples. We do not have that option. God has called us to lives of service.

This can be among the greatest challenges to our living as true disciples, I think. It is so much easier to define our discipleship in terms of church attendance. Spending a few occasional hours a week sitting in a church building is so much easier than living as a servant all day, every day.

Yes, *God* has called us to gather together as believers. But he has called us and gifted us to do so much more. It is ultimately through our service to others that *God* is glorified. So to deny our capacity to serve or our call to service is to deny our own discipleship. If Jesus is my Lord then service is my calling.

