

## Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13

When a person joins any organization or fellowship, they voluntarily accept the responsibility to live by the standards established by the organization. Whether that organization is a college fraternity, the Lions Club, Rotary Club, the Junior League, or the Church, certain standards of conduct and participation are outlined at the time of membership that are EXPECTED OF PERSONS WHO WISH JOIN. And although many of the organizations call themselves "Service Clubs," the church, if it is to be the Church, must have as one of its primary purposes, SERVICE. And this service takes two forms. (1) The church, and of course the Head of the Church Jesus Christ, MUST BE SERVED by its membership and constituents, in order that (2) the church, in the name of Christ, MAY SERVE OTHERS.

The Greek word used in the New Testament for church (ECCLESIA) means "*called out.*" The church is a community of people who have been called out of the world by God to be God's people. We have been called together as a church that we might worship God, and that we might receive God's judging, forgiving, and renewing grace. But it doesn't stop there. We also come together that we might be sent out again to be God's agents of forgiveness, reconciliation and renewal in the world.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word Church? We sometimes think of the church as a board or agency in New York, or Nashville or Montgomery. More often, we think of the church as the stucco building on Main Street in downtown Enterprise, but that is only part of the church. The church is people. You and I are the church. WHERE EVER THERE IS A CHRISTIAN, THERE THE CHURCH IS. When we talk about the church, we

are not talking about “them,” but about “ourselves.” When we say, “*Why doesn't the church do so and so?*” or “*The trouble with the church is...*,” we are asking why WE don't do so and so and are complaining about OUR OWN FAULTS. When we talk of service in and through the church, we are talking about the OBLIGATION of each one of us TO BE A SERVANT.

In the Scripture lesson that was read this morning, the Apostle Paul begins with an APPEAL TO UNITY within the body of Christ. Paul then continues by saying that within every Church, there is a diversity of gifts. God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, has gifted each one of us with one or more spiritual gifts. Is this idea of spiritual gifts a new idea for you? If so, let me briefly define what a spiritual gift is. A spiritual gift is a “*special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to each member of the Body of Christ according to God's grace (in other words, God decides what gift you will have) for use within and for the building up of the Body of Christ.*” Each of us has some quality, some talent, and some personal resource that can and should be shared. It is within this exchange of gifts, as I share with you and you share with me and with each other, that the true meaning of Christian Community is found.

And in Paul's writings he lists many of these gifts that God has granted to the church. And here in verse 12, we get a clue as to WHY we are such a gifted people. Paul says that the purpose of these gifts, and he lists here only a few of the gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) is “*to prepare God's people for works of SERVICE.*” When people are elected to positions of leadership here at First Methodist, THE PURPOSE OF THEIR LEADERSHIP is not to do all the work of the church, but rather to administer their committee, and train the people of the church to work and serve, so that “*the Body of Christ may be built up.*” As members of the church, the work that we do for and in the name of the church is for the building up of the body of Christ, for the Glory of God's name.

The term “MINISTER” (in Greek it is the word DIAKONIA) is another word that often confuses people. The term Diakonia literally means “SERVICE or HELPING.” But Christian ministry is sometimes misunderstood to be just the function of a specialized group of persons that we call the preachers or the ministers or the pastors. Certainly they are some who are called to a specialized form of ministry, we are ordained to Word, Sacrament and Order, but ALL CHRISTIANS are called to be ministers wherever Christ would have us serve in deeds and words. Christian ministry or Christian service is how we live out our understanding of who Christ is and what Christ would have us to do. Each of us has a MONDAY MORNING PULPIT. Monday through Saturday, at work and at play, WE ARE CHRIST MADE VISIBLE IN THE WORLD. It is WE who must convince the world of the REALITY AND RELEVANCE of the gospel or the world will be unconvinced.

Tony Campolo tells about a drunk who was miraculously converted at a Rescue Mission. Prior to his conversion, Old Joe had a reputation of being a derelict, a hopeless drunk. But following his conversion, everything changed. Joe became the most caring person anyone could know. He began working at the mission, doing whatever needed to be done. No task was too lowly. Whether cleaning the toilets, or serving meals, Joe did it all with a smile on his face and a gratitude in his heart for the chance to help others.

One evening, the director of the mission was delivering his evening message to the crowd, when one man came down to the altar and knelt to pray. The repentant sinner began shouting, *“Oh God, Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!”* The director knelt in prayer with him and whispered *“Son, I think it would be better if you prayed, ‘Make me like JESUS!’”* The man looked at him with tear stained eyes and asked, *“Is he like Joe?”* THE CHURCH MUST EITHER BE FAITHFUL AS A WITNESSING AND SERVING COMMUNITY or we will lose

our vitality and impact on an unbelieving world.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:16: *“Let your light shine in such a way that others may see your good works, and praise God who is in heaven.”* And Paul added in Colossians 3:17: *“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus....”* So the church calls us into service when we take vows of membership. God may not ask you to serve at the local Rescue Mission, but God is asking you to RESPOND to God's love, forgiveness, and acceptance by serving Him in some area of your life. To be a Christian is not only to believe and receive. IT IS ALSO TO LIVE AND GIVE AND SERVE AS A CHRISTIAN.

What I have been trying to say for the past few minutes is that there can be no legitimate Christian faith without Christian service. It is easy enough to agree in theory with that statement. We know that, as the Book of James Chapter 2 puts it, *“Faith without works is dead.”* The difficulty seems to be in putting our faith into action. We main line Protestants have almost shot ourselves in the foot, so to speak, with our STRONG EMPHASIS on salvation by grace alone and not by good works. This emphasis has caused a SPLIT IN OUR THINKING between Christian FAITH and Christian LIFE. So this morning I want to put those two halves of Christian faith and Christian life back together in your thinking. I want you to understand that CHRIST IS YOUR SAVIOR, but He is also YOUR LORD who calls us to serve Him in every sphere of everyday life.

It is not an either/or proposition. You can't have Christ as your Savior, and reject Him as your Lord. FAITH AND ACTION are two halves of the same whole. We can't have LEGITIMATE faith without action. The result of thinking that we can be saved without obediently living as those who have been forgiven and saved is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called *“cheap grace.”* Cheap grace is grace without obedience. Cheap grace reasons that

since we depend on God's grace and not our works for salvation, then we can model our lives on the world's standards. Cheap grace x demands, but is safe and painless and antiseptic. And the result of it all is that WE BEGIN TO THINK THAT OUR ONLY DUTY as a Christian is to leave the world for an hour or so on a Sunday morning and go to church.

Don't leave here today saying that I am trying to destroy the cherished doctrine of JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE through faith in Jesus Christ, that I am preaching works righteousness. I am not! We are righteous before God only through the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. HOWEVER, GOOD WORKS, OR CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS THE INEVITABLE RESULT OF SAVING FAITH. Good works is the fruit that is born on the tree of faith. To have faith in Christ as our Savior means to follow Him in His example of service. To receive God's Spirit is to be EMPOWERED to go to work, to be EMPOWERED to live a different kind of life, to be EMPOWERED to make a difference in the world. Christian faith does not free us FROM Christian service, but rather FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE.

Hopefully you are thoroughly convinced that Christian service is part of the joy of membership. I challenge you this morning to remember your membership vows. *"Will you be loyal to First United Methodist Church, and will you support this church through your prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service?"* Saint Augustine said once that, *"God is not greater if you serve Him, but YOU are greater if you serve Him."* And that remains the key to successful community life, both within and outside the church. We are greater as we serve, as we offer the gifts we have for the common good, and in the name of God. One time you said, "I WILL!" What I want you to think about this morning is *"Will you say YES to serving Christ and His Church again?"*