

If you were here last week, you know that we talked about the challenges of doing Church here in this space at this time. It's not all bad – in fact, next week our Lead Pastor Keven is going to talk about the good that comes from worshiping in this space. But an unfortunate reality about this room, this space we're in right now, is that it's big. There're a lot of us in here together. And while we're all participating, some of us have more to do than others. In a group this size, most of us can't help but become primarily consumers.

That's why, last week, we saw that primarily, "Church" isn't this space. So today I want to push that idea a little further. Since Easter, we've been talking about how we live Between Jesus' Resurrection and his Second Coming. 2 Peter told us:

We are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness. And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight." -- 2 Peter 3:13-14 (NLT)

Okay. Were supposed to live holy lives. So what does that pure and blameless life look like? Paul told us in Galatians:

You have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." -- Galatians 5:13-14 (NLT)

So what does it look like to love each other, to serve each other? Well again, we can't do that very well or at least very fully in a space like this. But, as we saw last week, Church isn't primarily a space like this. As Jesus said:

Where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them. -- Matthew 18:20 (NLT)

Church happens best when small groups of people who love Jesus get together and live out the Gospel together. This can be through serving, through studying, through celebrating.

This is where I want to hang out with you today. Let's ask more specifically about how we do Church together. Not what we're doing right now, where I am up here talking and you're out there listening and taking notes and considering. But how do *you* do Church?

In other words, what do *you* bring to the table? Why are *you* essential?

The great news, the exciting news, is that if you are following Jesus, then the Holy Spirit has given you particular abilities that make you unique and necessary to the Church. Your Church needs you. *You* are *vital* to what God is doing in Beavercreek, OH.

We can see that in 1 Corinthians 12. Turn there in your Bibles (or it'll be on the screens). If you grabbed one of our Bibles on the way in, we'll be on page XXX. If you don't own a Bible, please take that one with our complements.

As you're turning there, let's do a little background on the book of 1 Corinthians. It was written by one of the first followers of Jesus, a guy named Paul. He traveled all over the Roman Empire

visiting cities proclaiming the Good News of Jesus' resurrection. He gathered those who heard him into churches in each of those cities, and he'd usually stay with them for at least several months to teach them and show them how to follow Jesus.

Those early churches Paul planted didn't have buildings like we do. They actually didn't even have a Bible. They might have a copy of the Jewish scriptures. We call that the Old Testament now, but they didn't *have* a New Testament yet. It hadn't been written yet.

So when these early Christians did Church, they would gather in homes. They'd share a meal together, sing some songs together and recount and discuss teachings Paul had brought them about Jesus. The houses weren't very big, so 20 people would feel really crowded. So the church Paul planted in the city of Corinth was like his other churches in that it had several individual 'congregations' that met in various homes around the city.

Imagine if the Beavercreek Church of the Nazarene were like that – we were all broken into small groups of 20-30 persons who met together weekly in homes. Sounds a lot like the beginnings of what we talked about last week, doesn't it? [illustrate big church vs small churches?]

After Paul moved on from a city, he stayed in contact with those churches by writing letters. The book in our New Testament we call 1 Corinthians is one of those letters. We can tell by reading it that the Corinthian Christians had a bunch of questions about how to follow Jesus - questions that came up after Paul left. Questions that arose as they tried to do Church together. They wrote the questions in a letter, sent it to Paul, and our 1 Corinthians is the letter Paul wrote as a response.

You can see that as you read through the letter - he'll say, Now about this, or Okay, let's talk about that as he moves from topic to topic in their letter.

Fortunately for us, then, one of their questions was about how they were supposed to do Church when they got together. Paul had apparently taught them about what he called "Spiritual Gifts" or "Gifts of the Holy Spirit", and they asked for some clarification about them. Here's what he said:

Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don't want you to misunderstand this... There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

Paul says, There are lots of different *kinds* of gifts, but they're all from the same Spirit. We all serve in different ways, but we're all serving the same God. We're all different, but all the same. [spirit gives those persons gifts?] He goes on:

A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.

It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have. -- 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (NLT)

Why do we have Spiritual gifts? To help each other. Then Paul goes on to list a pretty nice variety of gifts, and reminds us that they all come from the Holy Spirit. [my gift goes out to everyone else]

This idea that we all have particular gifts and talents can be tough to get our minds around, especially if you're more familiar with this "big room" model of church. So let me show you something that may help get your brain around what Paul's talking about.

[Avengers clip]

Do you know why *The Avengers* worked so well as a movie, why it's the third highest grossing film of all time? Because every single character was needed for the story to work. If you had taken out any one of those characters, the team would've lost (yes, even Hawkeye!).

A super *team* is only super if each of them is necessary. And believe it or not, God designed the Church to function the same way.

Yes, I'm saying that Church is like *The Avengers*.

Which may not help matters much if you're sitting there thinking, Okay, I definitely *don't* have any "superpowers". I definitely don't have any special gifts from the Spirit.

But the Scriptures tell us that if you follow Jesus, if you have turned from sin and embraced the new life God offers, then God the Holy Spirit has given you some unique abilities.

The problem isn't that you don't *have* gifts. It's usually trying to figure out what those abilities are.

It can be a bit tricky to figure out exactly what your gifts are for a couple of reasons. First, there're just a *lot* of gifts. We just read the list Paul made there. Later in 1 Corinthians he gives another list. And in a few other places in the Scriptures, we find still OTHER lists. So some have compiled those lists all together and made a sort of test you can take to find out which gifts you have (you can find about 7,000 of these tests on the internet if you google "Spiritual Gifts Test").

And that's not a bad place to start, but it's limited because Paul didn't write us an exhaustive list of gifts. You can build a list of all the spiritual gifts listed in the Bible and that's not all the possible gifts of the Spirit.

The other reason it can be difficult to discern your gifts is that it's often hard to distinguish between a spiritual gift and a natural talent. Take Hospitality, for instance. Hospitality is one of those gifts listed. It shows up on a lot of the tests. And without question, once some people turn to Jesus, the Holy Spirit gives them a powerful burden to welcome other people in the name of Jesus, to make them feel welcomed and at home, instead of feeling like an outsider.

But other people are naturally hospitable. They were really good at making others feel welcome before they turned to Jesus and they're *still* really good at it now.

So is Hospitality a gift or a talent?

Believe it or not, a lot of ink has been spilled over trying to tease that out.

You can see how we can get bogged down in list-making and sorting and figuring so much that we make this whole discussion of Spiritual Gifts really intimidating. It's enough to make people want to throw up their hands and say, I'll just let the professional pastors handle everything. It's too confusing. Too much for me.

May I make a suggestion?

Let's set aside the list-making and arguing. Let's look for a bottom line that's exciting and helpful.

A Spiritual Gift is an ability that you particularly have *for the benefit* of those around you. It's a God-given ability that when you choose to use it, the Holy Spirit will do amazing things through.

And the *best* way to figure out what yours are? Ask people you're in community with.

Because here's the real tricky thing about Spiritual Gifts: usually if we're particularly good at something, we don't realize it. It comes so naturally and easily to you it doesn't *feel* like that big a deal. You look at what other people can do that you can't and think, Well if I could do what *they* can do, then I'd *really* be something!

So ask someone around you. Ask them what you do really well, that's super-impressive to them. Ask them what you do that helps them to follow Jesus better. And be prepared to share with them, too!

What God wants to do in your life isn't confined to a list. We have several people in this Church who are particularly good at working with technology. They serve in the tech booth, or work with the website. I can promise you that those aren't on any of the New Testament lists, and yet they use what they're good at to serve the rest of us here.

The best place for you to start is by asking someone you do Church with on a regular basis what they've noticed in you.

That's how I got started teaching. I didn't know I was particularly good at teaching. I knew I liked to read the Scriptures, to study in depth about God. I knew I loved to have spiritual conversations with people, to figure out where they're coming from and how to communicate clearly where I was coming from. I knew that when I led discussions or classes I just felt a little more alive than usual.

But it wasn't until my friends in college began asking me to lead Bible studies that I began to consider that God might have specifically gifted me to teach. And once I realized that, I began seeking out opportunities to teach, formally or informally. I made mistakes, I learned. I got better.

What do you love to do? What do others around you note that you're particularly good at? Start there. Make a list of two or three things, and then brainstorm how you can make a point to do those for the benefit of other people.

It doesn't have to be big. Start with small, simple things. What matters is that you start. Remember: these are the Spirit's gifts. You're not doing this on your own, you're working in conjunction with the Holy Spirit.

And then as you begin to get a sense for what the Spirit is calling you to do, don't be afraid to work at those gifts. If you're gifted to teach, learn how to be a better teacher. If you're gifted in hospitality, learn how to throw a better party. If you're gifted to serve, figure out how to use your serving resources more efficiently. If you're gifted with design or technology, read some books or take some classes to get better!

This isn't about not relying on the Spirit or becoming self-sufficient. It's about bringing God our very best. It's about doing whatever we can with the freedom we have in Jesus to serve those around us.

That's why we need Church to be more than just this Sunday morning space. In a space like this 300+ people just can't all use their God-given gifts and talents to serve each other. Of course there *are* ways to get involved. Through the tech or worship ministries, as a communion server or awesome purple t-shirt-wearing greeters or serving in our Kidz Church ministry.

But even more than that, we are able to use our gifts when we do Church small. When we gather with a few other people. That's when every single one of us becomes necessary.

Paul tells us that each of us is necessary. The Spirit gives each of us gifts that are for everyone else. When we choose not to use them we're actually robbing everyone else of something vital.

So here's what's true about you:

If you are following Jesus, then we need you to know what your gifts are. We need you to know how the Spirit has uniquely enabled you to serve our Church. Not this building, but the people sitting around you. God hasn't equipped anyone else to do what you are equipped to do. Don't rob us of your vital contribution.

If you're not following, Jesus, know that God is preparing a place in this community for you. God wants to do things through your life that seem supernatural. God wants to bring you into this body and make you more than you ever thought you could be.

Your first step is turning to Jesus: abandoning your self-centered ways that are leading to Death and following Jesus into life.

Bottom Line: just start doing something. Start serving. If it's the wrong fit, try something else. The Spirit has called you, the Spirit has equipped you, and the Spirit will guide you as you figure it out. So just. Start. Serving.

Examine

1. In the past week, when have I felt most alive? What was I doing then?
2. When in the week ahead can I choose to do that for the sake of someone else?
3. Who can I ask this week about my Spiritual Gifts?
4. What is my next step?