

[Picture] I want to begin today with the story of one of the most amazing Christians you've never heard of. In 1986, a man named Chiune Sugihara died in Kamakura, Japan, survived by his wife and a son. Sugihara had been a kind man who had a series of menial jobs - most notably selling light bulbs door to door. His funeral was Russian Orthodox - somewhat unusual for a Japanese man, but what surprised his friends and neighbors most was the large delegation of Jews from around the world who attended his funeral, including the Israeli ambassador to Japan. They had come to honor "Sempo", the name they had called Sugihara when he had served as the vice-consul of the Japanese Consulate in Lithuania from 1939-1940.

[Map of Lithuania] Lithuania was one of those countries caught between Germany and Russia in World War II. And like most European countries at the time, Lithuania had a large Jewish population that only swelled as Jews fled Poland ahead of the encroaching Nazi Reich. But the Jews in Lithuania were stuck - without visas they couldn't get out of the country, neither Russia nor Germany was known for their kindness to the Jewish people, and none of the surrounding countries were issuing visas to Jewish families.

[Sugihara again, stays up thru his story] Faced with a flood of Jewish refugees, and under strict orders not to issue any visas, Sugihara had a choice to make, and for him, it was no choice. Beginning on July 18, Sugihara began issuing travel visas to Japan as quickly as he could, disregarding the consulate's screening process, without authorization from Tokyo or his superiors in Lithuania. He also negotiated fiercely with Russian officials to allow them to permit Jewish refugees to travel on Russian trains to the far Eastern boarder where they could enter Japan and from there immigrate to China or the US. When no one stopped him, Sugihara began issuing visas at a furious rate - working 18-20 hr days, forgetting to stop for meals. He issued as many visas in one day as the Consulate usually issued in an entire month.

A month later, on August 20, the Japanese government ordered the Consulate evacuated ahead of the Russian armies entering Lithuania. But Sugihara didn't stop, continuing to issue visas on his way to the train station. Once boarded, he began signing and stamping blank visas and throwing them out the window of the train for the refugees to fill out on their own.

When he returned to Japan, Sugihara wasn't formally punished, though he was fired - officially because the government was "downsizing". For the rest of his life, the government never acknowledged what he did and only those closest to him had any idea.

Today, Chiune Sugihara is credited with issuing more than 1600 visas and saving somewhere between 6 and 10,000 Jewish lives. He is the only Japanese person to be included in Israel's "Righteous Among the Nations" - a group recognized for risking their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

[What would a side-by-side look like?] Hard to believe the same man, later in life, sold light bulbs door to door. I'd like to put these two men next to each other - Chiune Sugihara the

diplomat and Chiune Sugihara the light bulb salesman. Which man do you relate more closely with? The life-saving diplomat or the ordinary salesman? Most of us relate a lot more to the light bulb salesman. We see ourselves as ordinary, unremarkable. Worthwhile perhaps to our family and friends but less so to anyone outside our immediate circles.

This conversation we've been having for the last few months about Spiritual Calling has been challenging in large part because many of us feel that we don't *have* a spiritual calling. We believe that discovering our God-given callings is an important step in the journey God is calling Catalyst on. So during this series in particular, we've been investigating *how* God is calling us. How to discern those callings. We began by insisting that God calls *everyone*. We cannot ignore this basic truth. Everyone. Last week we saw that the way God calls us is by giving us gifts through the Spirit that enable us to carry out our calling.

[Slide from last week] Today, I want to press harder on the idea that our calling is this-worldly. I want to insist that *everyone* has a calling, that we need each other. I want to insist that whether you're a light bulb salesman or a diplomat, your calling matters greatly and that we need you to live into your calling.

In this regard, Sugihara is a wonderful mentor for us. The reason he is a model of faith for us is not because he was super-spiritual. Not because he was an amazing preacher or gave a ton of money to the Church or any of the other reasons we usually say people are spiritual giants. No, what makes Sugihara worth imitating is that he did what he loved - his diplomatic work - in such a way that he met a real need in the world around him. He did what no one else could do. [Visa Pictures] For Sugihara, it looked like issuing visas to refugees with nowhere else to go. Because that's what he could do. *That* is what living into his God-given calling looks like. What does yours look like?

We're spending most of this series in 1 Corinthians because the church in Corinth had the same problem - they had divided the world into Spiritual and Earthly (because that's what Greek culture did), and they had created a hierarchy of the gifts God gives us. The people who had more "spiritual" gifts held high esteem in the eyes of the rest of the Church. If they could deliver prophecies from God or speak in secret divine languages, everyone put them up on a pedestal.

[Scripture slide] Turn in your Bibles with me to 1 Corinthians 12. In this section of the letter, which we began last week, Paul is writing to correct this dangerous attitude. Paul is particularly worried because when the Corinthians divide themselves according to "spiritual" and "unspiritual" gifts, they don't actually look like God's kingdom - they look like the world around them. Last week, we saw Paul chastise them for acting like some gifts were better than others. This week, we'll see Paul continue that theme, using a famous metaphor.

Paul compares the Church to a body - and he's not the first to do this. Many famous thinkers had used the Body metaphor to talk about Greco-Roman society. They explained that bodies

are made of different parts, and some parts are obviously better than others - no one wants to be a stomach or colon! These thinkers used the Body imagery to justify their sharply hierarchical culture, with the few powerful living on the backs of the poor masses. But Paul flips the body metaphor on the Corinthians, explaining to them that in the Church, everyone matters, and no one is better than anyone else. Let's read together, beginning in verse 12:

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. -- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Paul says the Church is a Body like Christ's body - he uses Jesus' political title "Christ" - Anointed King, Messiah. Paul says that Christ's kingly body - his nation, his people, is made up of Jew and Greek, slave and free. That's *not* how anyone in Paul's day talked about the social body. In fact, one of the king's main jobs was border security. In order for the body to be whole, everyone who was *not* part of the body had to be kept out. People of the wrong race were out. So were slaves - not considered citizens, but something less. We still think like that today - leaders who advocate strong border security are still popular in the polls.

[Is this worth illustrating?] But by positioning the Church as the body of the Messiah, Paul reminds us again that the ways of God's kingdom are not the ways of the world. Our king offers his body to be broken open, and these wounds are the very way all we who were outsiders entered into God's kingdom. Our king has a broken body. Our Church is a broken body, a body broken open so everyone can come in.

What's more, it is precisely because the Church is open to everyone that we can speak meaningfully of calling. Paul goes on to correct the Corinthian arrogance:

Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable

parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. -- 1 Corinthians 12:14-26

Paul flips the Corinthian body imagery on its head using a metaphor that had been used for hundreds of years to tell people they didn't matter, that they were shameful, that they existed only to serve their betters. Paul challenges us to consider how bodies actually work: when your stomach hurts, your whole body is out of commission. When you have a headache or a broken finger these do not suffer on their own - every part of our bodies are part of every other.

In light of the gifts conversation, Paul pushes those of us who consider ourselves unspiritual, earthly, unimportant to reevaluate ourselves. If the foot says, I am not a hand, I am not part of the body, the foot is wrong.

If any of us says, I don't have gifts, I'm not good for anything, I don't have anything to contribute, we're wrong. God has called each of us. God has given each of us gifts. Paul continues:

All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church:

first are apostles,
second are prophets,
third are teachers,
then those who do miracles,
those who have the gift of healing,
those who can help others,
those who have the gift of leadership,
those who speak in unknown languages.

Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not! So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. -- 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

Everyone has gifts. Everyone has *different* gifts, just like our body is comprised of different parts. According to Paul, we ought to strive to be *helpful*. You and I are called to *help*. To participate in what God is doing in our community through Catalyst. To put a point on it, Catalyst needs you. God has given you gifts, and if you don't use them, you're hurting yourself. You're hurting Catalyst. And you're hurting a world that desperately needs what God is doing here at Catalyst, a work that you have an integral part to play.

Last week, we read that God gives us these gifts for the common good. We often don't see what we're contributing because it feels natural to us. I've often found a great help to identify how the Spirit has gifted you is to ask those with whom you're in community how they perceive your contribution. We see how others contribute much more easily than we see what we bring to the table.

So what if this week, you made it a point to sit down with someone close to you - a spouse, a family member, a close friend, your C-Group, and you shared with each other how you see the Spirit working through the other person? Not just in the Church building on Sunday mornings, but anywhere in your world.

What might you learn about yourself?

You might learn that there are no professional Christians because everyone is called. You might learn there are no better or worse callings because everyone is part of Christ's body. You might learn that God has gifted *you* to serve in surprising ways. Surprising because they're not onerous - quite the opposite. They flow naturally out of your soul to meet the needs of those around you.

[\[Calling Video\]](#)

Moved by Love, Brenda and Suzy did what they could. As stylists, they could cut hair.
Moved by love, Sugihara did what he could. As a diplomat, he could write visas.

Friends, we are all part of Christ's body. God has gifted you to serve. And Catalyst needs you. We cannot be the Church God is calling us to be unless we all participate - just as a body needs every part to be healthy.

What is your calling? How could Christ work in our community if you were leaning into that calling, serving the needs of those around you out of your loves?

Whether you're a diplomat or a light bulb salesman or a stylist, you are called. Whether you are a teacher or a painter, you are called. Whether you are an accountant or chef you are called. God has gifted you so that you can follow that calling.

So what's your next right step this week? Do you need to discover your calling? Have a conversation with some people close to you about how *they* see God working through you? What needs move you to action?

Communion SetUp

[Communion Slide] We begin at the Communion Table. This table invites us back to the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night before he was killed. During the meal, he broke bread and offered it to us as his body, broken for us. He offered us wine as his blood, poured out as a new covenant between God and humanity.

This meal invites us to become the body of Jesus, broken open so that we can enter in. By participating in this meal, we eat and drink in God's grace. We act out the way of our King, Jesus the Christ, whose ways are not the ways of the world around us. We are folded into the heartbeat of God, empowered to offer ourselves for the needs of the world around us.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion. If you want to be part of God's kingdom, to follow the way of our King, Jesus, if you're anxious to discern your gifts and meet the needs of the world, then you're welcome to come to the table today.

Benediction

Sugihara was moved by compassion to help. When asked, here's what he said:

[Green text behind image of Sugihara w/ quote in red] You want to know about my motivation, don't you? Well. It is the kind of sentiment anyone would have when he actually sees refugees face to face, begging with tears in their eyes. He just cannot help but sympathize with them. Among the refugees were the elderly and women. They were so desperate that they went so far as to kiss my shoes. Yes, I actually witnessed such scenes with my own eyes. Also, I felt at that time, that the Japanese government did not have any uniform opinion in Tokyo. Some Japanese military leaders were just scared because of the pressure from the Nazis; while other officials in the Home Ministry were simply ambivalent.

People in Tokyo were not united. I felt it silly to deal with them. So, I made up my mind not to wait for their reply. I knew that somebody would surely complain about me in the future. But, I myself thought this would be the right thing to do. There is nothing wrong in saving many people's lives... The spirit of humanity, philanthropy...neighborly friendship...with this spirit, I ventured to do what I did, confronting this most difficult situation—and because of this reason, I went ahead with redoubled courage.