

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 6TH JUNE 2021

ESSENTIAL QUESTION - HOW CAN I USE MY GIFTS FOR THE CHURCH?

"Welcome to our 'Church at Home' transcript for the 6th June 2021. I was on study leave last week, so apologies that this is coming a week late."

- Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 138:1-3, 8

I give you thanks, O Lord, with all my heart;

I will sing your praises before the gods.

I bow before your holy Temple as I worship.

I praise your name for your unfailing love and faithfulness;

for your promises are backed

by all the honour of your name.

As soon as I pray, you answer me;

you encourage me by giving me strength.

The Lord will work out his plans for my life—

for your faithful love, O Lord, endures forever.

Opening Prayer

Merciful God,

you have assured your children

of eternal life

through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Deliver us from the death of sin

and raise us to new life in him,

who lives and reigns

with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and forever. Amen

Reading - Romans 12:1-13

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Sermon - 'How can I use my gifts in the Church'

Are you good at using the gifts that you have been given? I'm sure like many of you, I have trying to be outside as much as possible recently to enjoy the sunny weather. It gave me an opportunity to finally use a barbecue that Julie and I were given as a wedding gift last year. Unfortunately with the delivery times, our barbecue only arrived at the end of the summer and so spent a whole year in its box in the garage. This amazing gift was just lying there unused. When you give a gift, you want to see it being used, not just sitting in its box packed away somewhere. God has given each one of us a gift, not a wedding gift or a birthday gift, but a ministry gift that we can serve him in

the life of our church. Today I want us to consider, 'are we using our gift to serve God, or is it in a box somewhere hidden away?'

We have been doing a series over these last number of weeks looking at what church is all about, and now we have reached the stage of thinking about how we apply all those things that we have learned, and practically love God, love others, and make disciples. So today we are going to think about how we can use our gifts to serve, asking the question, 'How can I use my Gifts for the Church?'

As we begin, I want us to briefly look at what the Bible says about gifts and serving, because it is important that we have the right attitude, motivation, and understanding. Let me highlight a few principles from Romans chapter 12. First, we serve as a response to who God is and what he has done for us. In Romans 12:1 it says, *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship."* In view of God's mercy we serve. Notice the order of that. God has shown us his mercy, and we serve as a response, so we do not serve for in order to obtain mercy, or love, or approval, because that been given to us through faith in Christ. Jesus has died for us, so we live for him, and notice that this dying to self and living for Jesus, is described as worship. Worship is not just something we do for an hour on a Sunday morning, worship is our whole life. We serve 'in view of God's mercy' and, secondly, we serve with *different gifts*.

Verse 6 says, *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us."* God in his grace has given each of us a gift so that we can serve him, and each other. These ministry gifts are given to everybody in the church, not just for some, or a select few, but to all. So if our church of St. Andrew's is like a body, then we all have a function and a unique way that we can serve God and help others. Paul gives us an example about what some of those gifts can be, in verse six he talks about prophecy, in verse seven he talks about

serving and teaching, and in verse 8 he talks about encouragement, giving, leading, and showing mercy. These are just examples of different types of gifts, it is not an exhaustive or complete list. If you read 1 Corinthians 12 you will see some different gifts mentioned there, and in 1 Peter 4:11 he simply just divides them into two groups, speaking gifts and serving gifts.

These gifts are more than just a natural ability, they are gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. These gifts are suited to your personality, they enable you to serve in a way that excites you, and that makes your heart feel joy. When we use these gifts to serve in church, we find it is not a burden or a chore, but actually lifts and frees you. There is no experience quite like using your gifts for the glory of God.

Often when we think about gifts, our focus can be on the more visible and up front gifts. But a vibrant church does not just need gifts on the stage or in the pulpit, but sometimes more vitally, needs the gifts of those who can create organisational spreadsheets, people who can send an encouraging text message at just the right time, someone can talk to a newcomer and make them feel like they have been friends their whole life, and people that have the gifts to be able to fix something before anyone else even notices that it is broken. We all have a different gift that we can use to serve in our church. If you do not know what your gift might be, let me suggest a few ways that might help you discover what it is. Read over Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and see if anything there stands out to you (if you're not sure what some of those things actually are come and ask and I can help to explain). Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you what the gift he has given you. Think about what excites and inspires you, or what problems and needs do you see in our church or community. Ask somebody who knows you well what they think your gift might be. Try something and see how you get on. We serve because of God's mercy, and we serve with the gifts we have been given, and thirdly, we serve to love.

Romans 12:10 says, *“Be devoted to one another in love.”* We do not use our gifts to show off, rather we use them to serve each other in love, and to build up one another. Throughout this series, I have been trying to emphasise that church is about people. Church is not a building, it is not a service that we come to as spectators, but it is a community that we participate in. We should not come with an attitude of what can I get, but instead with an attitude of what can I give. God has shown us his mercy in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit has given us a gift of grace, and we are in a community where those gifts are needed.

So what do we do? We serve. this is what Paul says in vv.6-8, *“If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is to give, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”* Just like there are a variety of gifts, there are of course a variety of ways to serve. Some might be regular, while others might be more occasional or a once-off. Some serving is done formally, for example being elected onto committee. Whereas some serving is informal, so you don't need to ask permission to invite somebody over for a meal! Of course there are different seasons of life, and times when you might have more opportunities to serve than at others. And I know that so many of you are already serving faithfully, and this is just to encourage you in what you are already doing.

However, we do need people to volunteer in our church. For example, our works team need help with things like painting, gardening, and simple maintenance tasks like putting out the bins or reading the meter. If you are not already part of it, we need people on the welcoming team so that everyone is greeted as they arrive, and to make newcomers feel welcome. Moving forward I would love to involve more people in our service, maybe you could volunteer to do the bible reading, or to lead us in prayers of intercession. When we open up as restrictions lift, we will need volunteers for

children's ministry, and for hospitality in offering people tea and coffee after the service. And the most important way, that all of us can serve is in praying for our church, for our Sunday services, for each other, and for our impact in the community.

In my life I have listened to a lot of sermons, I have sung a lot of hymns, I have read the bible from Genesis to Revelation, but the thing that has probably deepened my faith and matured my love the most has been serving in the church. God has shown us his mercy, so let us serve him. God has given us gifts, let us use them. God is giving us opportunities to serve, so let us love one another.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the mercy you have shown us in Jesus Christ,
who came not to be served but to serve,
and give his life as a ransom for us.

Thank you for the gifts that you have given to each one of us.
If we don't know, help us to discover what they are.
Teach us how to use them well.
Guide us how we can use them to love others
and serve you.

Come Holy Spirit,
fill us with love for each other.
Excite us about using gifts.
Give us a fresh enthusiasm to serve.

In Jesus' name.
Amen