

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 5, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 224, 416, 496, 293, 336.

Lessons: Joshua 24:11-18, 1 Corinthians 12:1-27, Matthew 6:1-4.

Sermon Text: Romans 12:3-8

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I think you realize that different people have different abilities, skills, and gifts from God. That becomes more obvious as we grow older. For example, some people are good at one school subject or another, some people are great with their hands and can do lots of mechanical or other skilled work, some are great at explaining things or teaching. Today let's talk about some of the kinds of skills for the church that people have. Today we are reminded that

MEMBERS OF CHRIST ALL HAVE GIFTS TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER

1. ***“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,”***
2. **But recognize that God has given you gifts**
3. **So that you may serve one another.**

In these verses, Paul applies God's grace to the daily lives of believers. He just encouraged believers to be transformed, changed by the Word of God, and he now becomes very practical. He writes ***“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”*** Romans 12:3 (NIV)

In the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, all believers are part of the body of Christ. Pride is out of place, for we all have gifts. Every one of us is infected with the sin of pride by nature and we need to be cautioned against it. Scripture here warns against being high-minded, puffed up, conceited. We are to soberly realize that God gives various gifts to believers.

All believers make up one body in Christ, who is the head of the body, and the creator of their unity. In this spiritual body, some are gifted with and called for one sort of work; others for another sort of work. We are to serve Christ and one another as best we can for the common benefit.

In the world greatness is often being more important or more powerful than others, or in exercising authority over and lording it over others. In one discussion with his disciples, Jesus said ***“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.”*** Matthew 20:24-25 (NIV) That is not to be the way among God's people.

Paul tells this to each one of us as God gives out the measure of faith. He speaks of the special gifts of grace which find their application in the life in of a visible Christian congregation. These gifts are graces given to us by God. Because every Christian has received some gifts of God, it is God's will that those gifts be used in our lives to the glory of God and to the benefit of one another. Paul writes the way he does ***“because of the grace God gave [him].”*** Romans 15:15 (NIV) He wrote to the Ephesians: ***“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”*** Ephesians 3:7-8 (NIV) And so he speaks with authority, remembering that God gave him the gifts he had.

His warning against thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to leads to his talking about some of the gifts God gives and Paul uses the illustration of the human body. For just as each human has many members

in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, in the church, being many, have one body in Christ, but every one is a member one of another,

But just as we must not be sinfully proud of our gifts and talents, so we must take care lest we are lazy and slothful in using our gifts for the good of others. We must not say or think ‘my gifts are not important or are not needed, therefore I will do nothing.’ Instead we must do all we can with our gifts to serve God and others in the strength of the grace of Christ. Whatever our gifts or situations may be, let us try to live humbly, diligently, cheerfully, and in simplicity; not seeking our own credit or profit, but the good of many,

Paul often uses the picture of the human body when he talks about the Holy Christian Church, and the visible community of all believers. He wrote to the Corinthians when he listed some of the gifts and skills of God to men **“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.”** 1 Corinthians 12:12 (NIV) He wrote in Ephesians: **“speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”** Ephesians 4:15-16 (NIV)

The human body has many parts, many organs, many members but these are not all alike. They are different in function and yet serve the body, each in its own special way. And in the same way all we Christians together form the body of Christ. We are members one of another, and can therefore serve the body properly only by working together, guided by the mind and Spirit of God.

Paul then shows some of the diversity of skills and gifts among Christians. In working together and serving one another, all the believers are serving Christ. Paul here lists seven special gifts given to Christians in the church on earth and asks the individual Christians to apply those gifts and use them for the benefit of others.

Unfortunately, because of our sinful human nature such skills and gifts have sometimes been used for self-glorification and not to glorify God. Simple modesty and humility must be the attitude and the use of these gifts. These come from God and they are connected to faith.

We should all also use our gifts in accordance with the purpose of God, in a way that agrees with his will. The gifts of grace found in the Christians are many and varied, but their end and object is the same, to serve the Lord, not to serve their own advantage.

The gift of prophecy first of all refers to speaking the Word of God and explaining it. All exposition of Scriptures at all times must follow the teachings of Scripture, not adding to the Word of God, not subtracting from the Word of God and not twisting or changing the Word of God. Because faith is based entirely and alone upon the inspired Word of God, and never follows reason or philosophy, so teaching of Bible truths never starts with preconceived notions and ideas.

Our epistle lesson also speaks of some of the gifts given to the church in Paul’s day. Some of these gifts, such as speaking in tongues, are no longer needed in the church today. Paul wrote to the Corinthians **“Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”** 1 Corinthians 14:3 (NIV) Prophecy must not try to force Scripture to say what we want to say, or what sinful people want Scripture to say. We think of the sinful examples of how people twist scripture to approve of all sorts of sexual immorality and amorality.

Paul mentions **“serving”**. There are many kinds of service in the church. These include things that we might think are simple, or even beneath us, such as cleaning the church, lawn mowing, maintenance and serving congregational meals to name a few. Let us pay attention to such service, for that, too, is serving the Lord. In our smaller congregations, we all must at times serve in different ways, so that “the work may be done”. There are many things that can be done to serve fellow Christians. These include also service on church councils and committees of voters to help guide the affairs of the congregation.

Paul mentions teaching, saying ‘if one has the gifts of teaching, let him attend to his teaching.’

Paul writes **“if it is encouraging, let him encourage.”** If you have the gift of encouraging, and which of us doesn’t need encouragement at times? – go about it cheerfully. This includes such things as encouraging the pastor in his work. Encouraging Sunday School teachers and Bible Class teachers in their work. Encouraging the discouraged, the downcast, those in poor health in every area of their lives. Scripture has an abundance of words of encouragement that you can share whether personally or in writing.

When it comes to giving, of **“contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously.”** Not everyone has been blessed with the same material gifts – with wealth or income equally. There was a man in Pastor Mehlretter’s first parish who always put a dollar in the collection plate every week, although he lived in a tumble-down house that hadn’t seen paint in decades – if ever – and was even more humble and run-down inside. And then in the same congregation there were men who owned prosperous businesses. If one gives and shares some of his richer blessings with the poorer in this world’s goods or to such as are in need or want, let him do so in sincerity, with the single and undivided purpose to be of service, and not to raise a monument to himself or to get praise and honor from men.

“If it is leadership, let him govern diligently.” If any one rules, that is, has skills of leadership, and occupies a position as a leader or supervisor of any church-work, he should perform his work with zeal, always devoting his full attention to it.

Leading can be done in many ways, whether through offices in the congregation or through leadership and management of projects the congregation undertakes – physical projects, outreach or mission projects, or roles of admonition and encouragement for members who aren’t making full use of the congregation’s worship and services! We must even think of people who help guide activities within the congregation.

And finally Paul says **“if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”** Show mercy and love, and do it cheerfully, encouraging one another.

The sick and afflicted among us should be given the mercy, the active sympathy of the others, not with grudging uncharitableness, but in the spirit which rejoices in the opportunity of being able to help others, which always shows compassion at the prospect of helping lessen suffering of any kind.

Let us serve cheerfully, serving both God and man. Let us teach cheerfully, for it is serving the Lord. Let us encourage cheerfully. Let us give for the church and for the needs of others cheerfully. Let us lead cheerfully. Let us show mercy with all cheerfulness.

And remember, all this happens when we present our bodies and lives to the Lord as living sacrifices, not conforming to the ways and attitudes of the world! Lord, let us serve as one body to your glory and the salvation of many souls! Amen.