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Title: The Discipleship Gene: Serving

Date: September 22 & 23, 2018

Preaching: Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

Scripture: [Ephesians 2:4-10](#)

Text: [1 Corinthians 12:4-12, 27](#)

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Sometimes I am amazed at what sticks with you from a sermon. That was what happened last week. If you missed it, you might be amazed too. We are in a sermon series about discipleship, looking at the genetic make-up of a fully committed follower of Jesus. We do it every fall. Two weeks ago, we talked about worship, about what we

are doing right now. Worship isn't entertainment and you aren't the audience. The gathering gene isn't about us. It is about God. God is the audience of worship. We gather at the invitation from God, to offer honor and praise, giving thanks for God's grace and love.¹ I hope that stuck with you.

Last week, we looked at the connecting gene. What I hoped stuck was this. Just like God designed animals to connect in groups, God wants disciples to connect in groups for fellowship and spiritual transformation. What I've heard a lot this week was all about alligators and lizards. For those who weren't here, I started the sermon talking about groups of animals and their various names. You know, like a pack of dogs. I shared that a group of lizards is a lounge of lizards. No kidding. Amazing isn't it, given the expression, lounge lizard? And a group of alligators is a congregation which is equally amazing. One retired pastor in our congregation caught me afterward and said, "I wish I'd know that 40 years ago!" "Why?," I asked. "Because that's the kind of church I was serving. I had a congregation acting like alligators, constantly snapping with each other."

We had a laugh but what came to mind was the congregation of alligators that Paul writes to, a problem church that Paul started the church in Corinth. It was small, probably no more than fifty members and they were constantly snapping at each other. They were divided into political factions. They were debating sexual ethics. They were fighting over who should receive the Lord's Supper and who should not. They were suing one another in court. They were bowing before the shrines of their culture. To top it off, there was one-upmanship about talents and ability, about the values of individual's

members of the body and how they serve. So Paul writes about it and says: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:1, 7)

That's a genetic statement and it is why this passage came to mind. It is about the third discipleship gene, serving. You have been given a gift to use for the common good. We are not gifted by God for our own good but rather to serve others. If you follow Jesus, God doesn't just call you to go to church, God creates you to serve the family of God.

Knowing that Paul spent a lot of time with the church in Corinth, as long as three years in one stretch, Paul is reminding them of things he has already taught them while he was with them. It is why he says, "I don't want you to be uninformed." Other translations are harsher. "I don't want you to be ignorant." He is saying, "You know this. Don't act like you don't know it, that you are uninformed or ignorant. You know that we are created, gifted and designed to serve, to do good work for the common good." It is a regular theme found in lots of his letters. He says it this way to the Ephesians. "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." (Ephesians 2:10) You might think you were created to be a banker or salesman or a teacher or to run a business. You may well be those things and more. But before all of those jobs were even thought of, God created you to serve. ²

But God doesn't just create you to serve. God chooses you to serve. Peter says it this way:, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people..." (1 Peter 2:9) Maybe you didn't know that about yourself or about the person sitting beside you or in front of you or behind you. You are a priest. They are a priest. Everyone here is a priest.

That might stretch your imagination or concept about who a priest is and I can understand. It probably is helpful to put it into the context of the first century. In Israel, and in other nations, there was a two-track system. There was a people track and priest track. God actually set this up when God gave the Law, appointing the tribe of Levi as the priests. They were a set apart people, chosen because of the luck of being born into the tribe of Levi. They had special duties. There was a Holy Place where only priests could go. There were prayers that only priest could say. There were sacrifices that only priests could offer. There were words of forgiveness that only they could state. There was an ultra-special place, the Holy of Holies that only the high priest could go. Then Jesus comes along and changes everything on the cross. What priests were doing with their sacrifices and words, Jesus did

with his death. When Jesus died, he tore the curtain and temple in half and suddenly, you didn't get right with God through a sacrificial act by a priest.

Logic might suggest that since there wasn't a need for sacrifices anymore, that priests were no longer needed. It was just the opposite. Instead of eliminating priests, it eliminated the two-track system. It made everyone who follows Jesus, a priest. You, you and you. By saying yes to Jesus you become a priest. Maybe you've heard of the phrase that Martin Luther coined, "the priesthood of all believers." He didn't make that up. He understands what Jesus did for us and what Peter teaches us about the serving gene. You are chosen to serve and you are being "turned into a spiritual house, a royal priesthood." The two-track system is over. There is no longer the professionals and the amateurs, the priests and the people. Everybody is in the ministry game and no one is a spectator in the stands. God is equally accessible to all the faithful, and every follower of Jesus has equal potential to minister to one another.

God created you to serve. God chooses you to serve. God equips you to serve. That's important because I can hear you say, "Wait a minute Randy, I can't do what you do." But you can because you have the tools and talents to be a priest, to minister. Remember, Paul says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7) You have a talent, a gift and it is God's design that the combined talents and gifts that God blesses a community with are to be used to build the Body of Christ. Paul teaches us that this was God's plan all along. God designed the church, our church, every church to be led by people who have the gift of leadership, to be taught by people who have the spiritual gift of teaching, to be encouraged by people who have the gift of encouragement, to be hosted by people who have the spiritual gift of hospitality, to be guided by people who have the gift of administration, to be funded by those who have the spiritual gift of generosity. Paul says this is God's design for the church and all of those gifts and more are to be used for the common good.

This concept was what made the church so exciting in its earliest days. Everybody had something to offer. Everybody was in the priest business, rich or poor, male or female, "Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13) and all had spiritual gifts that equipped them to serve. And they did. They were so excited and everyone was involved because they could say, "I have a role to play, I have a gift to present, I am equipped to help build this community." It is what propelled the ministry and mission of the church. Unfortunately, what happened over time was the church slipped back into the two-tiered system. Off and on throughout the centuries, when the pull back to the two roles of priest and people, ministers and members, the vitality and energy of the

church suffered. The history of Christianity, the history of denominations, even the history of congregations like ours, is periods of growth and excitement that happens when everyone used their spiritual gifts to equip the Body of Christ. But when gifts are withheld, when the old model of professionals and amateurs show up, the church suffers and decline happens because the body just doesn't work right when something is missing. It is because God uses you to serve.

God uses you to serve the body. The church is the Body of Christ and just like anybody, we are connected. Again, Paul reminds the Corinthians because he doesn't want them to be uninformed or ignorant. That is to say, "You know this." You know that "...you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27) The church is the presence of Christ on earth, a body and just like a body, you need all of the parts. To drive this point home, he gives something of a ridiculous but helpful example. He says the body is a unit even though it has lots of parts. Because the body has many parts that work together, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'" (1 Corinthians 12:21) Of course, it can't. But if it could what would happen. Paul tells us "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it..." (1 Corinthians 12:26a). You know this, about your body. I know this and have been living through this over the past month with a torn meniscus, which I'm glad to say I am much better. But it is amazing how pain in one place, in this case, my knee, can cause my other knee to hurt or my back to hurt or give me a headache. When one part suffers, a lot of parts suffer. To be healthy, I need every body part to be working together and so it is with the church. When people with gifts of help, don't help, when people of gifts of encouragement don't encourage, when the compassionate don't care, greeters don't greet, or singers don't sing, or evangelists don't invite, then the church doesn't work. The body suffers. Paul says, "You are the Body of Christ" and there are no useless parts. Every part is needed because God uses you to serve.

Which part are you? Are you the hands of Christ, doing His work? Are you the feet of the Body, taking his good news to the world? Are you the voice of Jesus, singing His praise? Are you the heart of Jesus, bring others to His love? Maybe you are the elbow of Christ, nudging and encouraging others. Maybe that's what I'm doing right now, jabbing you in the side, encouraging to serve. I can tell you what you aren't. You aren't something sitting on the skin, sucking up nutrients from the body. What do you call that? A parasite and God didn't create you to be a parasite, just to hang around and feed on the Body of Christ. Parasites aren't in God's design.

Like Paul, “I do not want you to be uninformed, I don’t want you to be ignorant.” God created you to serve. God chooses you to serve. God equips you to serve. God uses you to serve. So serve! Find a place. Use the card passed out with your bulletin. You have a gift, given by God and using it is critical to the Body of Christ. Use it as a type of gene therapy, as a way to embrace the discipleship gene of serving.

¹ Bolsinger, Tod E.. *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian: How the Community of God Transforms Lives* (pp. 86-87). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition

² The four points come from a reworking of a six-point sermon by John Ortberg, *Belong: Serving* preached 8-12-18 at Menlo Church.