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Title: This Is Us: Equipped

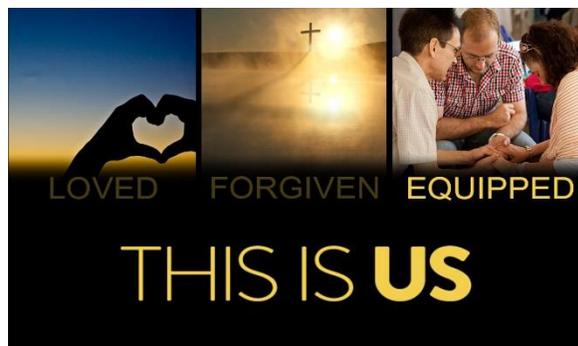
Date: August 20, 2017

Preaching: Senior Associate Minister Ryan Hazen

Scripture: [1 Peter 4:8-11](#)

Text: [Romans 12:1-8](#)

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Today is the last installment of a three-week sermon series entitled THIS IS US. We stole the title of the series from the hit TV series of the same name. The show deals with the identity of all the characters and we, in this series are dealing with our search for our identity as Christians. It is about the things that tell others that we are Christ

followers. We've boiled it down to three overarching points on which we can hang our hat – I admit it is oversimplified but I hope it has been helpful - we are loved, we are forgiven and we are equipped.

We started by talking about the importance of identity and identification. We have a variety of forms of ID that tells others who we are but what is it that tells others that we are Christian? Being sure of your identity and how you see yourself has a lot to do with how you live your life. When we understand who we are in the light of God, it transforms how we see and act toward others and ourselves. Knowing our identity as Christians shapes us – knowing how God sees us informs our life's journey.

Christian identity starts with the fact that YOU ARE LOVED. When you think no one else in the whole world loves you, you are still loved. You are loved by someone who is the very definition of love. NOTHING in all of creation can separate you from that love. Rising out of this love is the fact that YOU ARE FORGIVEN and called to forgive others.

We said last week that forgiveness, in its essence, is a decision made on the inside to refuse to live in the past. It's a conscious choice to release others from their sins against you so that YOU can be set free. It doesn't deny the pain or change the past, but it does break the cycle of bitterness that binds you to the wounds of yesterday. Forgiveness allows you to let go and move on. Forgiveness means no longer allowing a person or event to have power over you and control you.

Today, we move from the love that we receive and the forgiveness which we have and offer to others to being equipped to serve the world in the name of Christ. Having these three – LOVED, FORGIVEN, EQUIPPED is who we are as Christians – these three things define us. These three should be on our Christian ID card that we show to others.

Before I get too deep into this matter of being equipped, just so I know how much trouble I'm about to get into, I'd like to see how many ministers there are in the congregation – show of hands. OK, thank you. Here's where we're headed - God equips all of us Christ followers to serve in some way – different ways absolutely, but in some way. In the 12th chapter of Romans, Paul is calling for what I would call "full-bodied worship."

The actions of unity, humility, love and service described in these verses are what it looks like to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice – all of that is worship – using our full bodies. I think that too often we believe that worship is adequately performed through our corporate liturgy, preaching, and music – we define what we do inside this room on Sunday morning as worship – and it is that certainly. These practices are not wrong; but they do not reach far enough. For Paul, worship is full-bodied. It happens in community as we live out our faith by serving one another to build up the body of Christ. The quality of our worship is not measured by what happens on only Sunday mornings, but by what happens Sunday afternoon through Saturday evening.

What is it that you do from noon Sunday until bedtime on Saturday to glorify God or said another way, what is it that you do to be a full-bodied worshipper in every waking hour? A man walked into the church on Wednesday morning and said four words to me and I have to tell you – I've had many great moments in my eleven year ministry at Geist Christian Church but this encounter and these four words rank near the top for me. Those words – "I'm here to volunteer." This good man walked through the door of the church on Wednesday ready to worship – and glorify God he did – right out front in the landscape beds pulling bucket after bucket of weeds.

In verses four through eight, Paul uses the image of the body having many members that he's also used in other writings and acknowledges that not all the members have the same function but that all the members make up one body in Christ. He then starts giving examples of the gifts that differ – some have them some don't – 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; the weed-puller in pulling weeds – ok, Paul didn't write that last one but I

did because it's worship. When you do any of these, you become a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We have information sheets in our gift bags that we give to first time visitors that describe the various ways to connect at Geist Christian Church – there's a sheet for children and youth, a sheet of the various small groups and a sheet that offers ways to serve. See something there – food pantries, prison ministry, Season of Giving, Ronald McDonald and Dayspring Homeless Shelter meals – all existing opportunities. But if you don't see something that you'd like to do that you have gifts in that would glorify God, let us know.

When I worked for our denominational office, one of my hats was to help churches with strategic planning. I don't remember all of the churches I visited but I remember conducting a series of meetings with members of our downtown church in Wichita, Kansas. These meetings were to hear from the congregation about what they liked about the church, what they'd like to see happen - much like we've just done with our Café Conversations.

In one of those sessions I was leading, I asked a question about programs that they felt the church could establish to meet needs in the community. One woman, who had introduced herself earlier as a recently retired elementary school teacher, spoke eloquently about how great it would be to have a tutoring program at the church for area students that attended the grade school directly across the street. She went on to say that she would love to lead such a program and had other recently retired teachers that would be delighted to help. Such words from church members – here or anywhere – energize me.

I got as enthused as my low-key personality gets and said, "That's great! – what a great program and what a great ministry for the church." She said, "Oh, I won't do it." "Why not?" I asked. She looked at me and said, "Don't you know how this church works? I'd be dead by the time it would work its way through the education committee and then to the finance committee and then to the board – it would take forever if they would approve it at all."

She went on, "There would be worries about kids in the building and wear and tear on the carpet and any number of other concerns." I became very sad, for this woman, for this church, for the children that could be helped and for God. I heard a few years later that this church had closed and I was not surprised.

I hope and pray that Geist Christian Church is not that church. If you don't see something on this list that fits your gifts, start something that does. If it

glorifies God, the staff will do our best to support you but perhaps more importantly, get out of your way so that you can succeed. Do you want to pull weeds? Let me get you a bucket. Do you want to start a tutoring program? Let me help put you in touch with the people that can make it happen. Do you want to learn the sound board? I know people. Do you want to connect with people at the food pantry? Let me drive you there and introduce you. Do you want to form a new prayer group? We can make it happen.

Many people, even if they are not procrastinators in their day to day activities are procrastinators when it comes to service to God. The excuses are as many and varied as teenagers give for not cleaning their room. You will never know what your gift is if you are sitting around and saying, "God, show me my gift so I can get started serving you." I guarantee you will be saying that same prayer for a long time because God can only hit a moving target. Try some things – if it's not a fit, that's OK – move on and try something else.

We know we should reach out to others, but feel insecure or worried about what to do. We're unsure of our gifts or interests. We put off our investment in the church. We worry. What if I do a poor job? What if I find out that I can't even do it? Look around at what others are doing and ask if you can join in. If they tell you "no," come see me! Your church needs you to be a minister, fully equipped and serving others in Christ's name.

God does not call the qualified, God qualifies the called. You are called. You – all of you – are ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You've been called – you've been loved – you've been forgiven – you've been equipped. God stands ready to qualify you when you step out to serve God in some way. Do you remember the question I asked early on in the sermon about how many ministers there were in the congregation this morning? I didn't ask how many ordained minister or licensed ministers or how many people have a \$30,000 seminary certificate or even a \$10 online ordination – I asked how many ministers.

I worked my way through my last two years of college and then two gap years before graduate school working in a 510 room hotel. When you work in a place like that, you get access to what is called the "back of the house" – the area in all public buildings that is used to serve the public but that the public does not see. There are separate passageways for workers and even separate elevators so as not to disrupt the flow of traffic for the clients and customers. I had the same experience last month managing the exhibit hall at the General Assembly downtown at the convention center.

Out in the public areas of a convention center or hotel, people walk back and forth on nicely cleaned carpet amidst travertine walls and ride the elevators between floors in brightly lit elevator cars with mirrored walls and Brazilian cherry wood trim. But in the “back of the house” and on the service elevators, the real action takes place – the real work gets done. It’s where housekeepers get to and from the laundry with their carts and maintenance people with toolboxes and spare parts for everything from toilets to TVs make their way to and fro.

The “service” elevators are aptly named as food carts with room service and catering plates with thousands of pieces of rubber chicken and all the things that make the hotel or convention center run happens in the service corridors and service elevators.

Things happen in the church building when the building is seen as a tool for ministry – a mission outpost from which we are sent into the back of the house – the service corridors and elevators of the world before us. When we look at everyone we encounter as a beloved brother or sister, and recognize that all the goodness in us is also present in them, we find that God is there.

When we relate to the people around us with compassion, we find God’s compassion surrounding us all. That’s where we look for God. Not in some supernatural experience, but in ordinary, everyday encounters with other people. We find God’s love and forgiveness waiting for us when we recognize ourselves as equipped for ministry. We – every last one of us - are ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You do not need a piece of paper from a seminary to know that you are loved, forgiven and equipped for service to others.

Being equipped, serving others – is a part of your Christian identity. It’s who you are. My prayer is that you may be encouraged in these gifts from God, and then take them and apply it to your life and leave with a different outlook on your life. Know that beyond all else you are LOVED by the one who is LOVE and that by accepting that love, you are FORGIVEN so that you may also FORGIVE OTHERS so that the hurt of others no longer controls you and equipped to share that good news with a world in need in a wide variety of ways. It is your identity as Christian. Carry it with you. Show it to others so that they may see who you really are because of your relationship with Christ.

Let me ask that question again, just so I can have a sense of who this congregation really is. Let me see the hands of the ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this congregation.

