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Put Your Whole Self In - Service

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

John 13:12-17

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

We are now halfway through our sermon series entitled "Put Your Whole Self In," where we are looking at how we live as faithfully as possible in all aspects of our lives. We opened our series talking putting our whole selves into our prayer life and how our relationship with

God deepens and strengthens as we are in conversation through prayer, mindful to not just talk at God, but listen for God's desires for our lives and the world around us. Last week we focused on our presence and how when we show up, not just in body, but also in mind and spirit and heart, participating in the life of the church through worship and small groups, we open ourselves to the opportunities for growth, to being challenged among the community, being inspired by one another, and growing together in ways we couldn't do by ourselves. We talked about Christianity being a team sport, something we have to do in community as the body of Christ.

This week our focus shifts to service, our active giving back to the community and God's mission in the world - how God chooses and empowers us to accomplish the transformation of the world. Us! Ordinary people who are equipped to do extraordinary things by God working in and through us. Through our service, we become the agents of God's love to a hurting world.

In our first scripture reading we heard how the Holy Spirit pours out gifts among the followers of Christ, and how our uniqueness, our individuality and gifts and talents are needed to build up the unified body of Christ. We heard that some are given the gifts to be teachers and others prophets and others leaders. As we talk today, I want you each to take time to reflect on the gifts that God has made in you. We are each uniquely gifted and blessed with passions and areas of interest, talents and skills - some of them we grow and develop through practice and training, but others seem to naturally well up within us, or they're our default, simply the way we live in the world. We might not even realize the different aspects of our personality, or gifts & talents, are blessings from God, and that God might want us to use that gift to work in our church community and world.

An attorney and lifelong Methodist was an active member at a church that invited their members to take a Spiritual Gifts Inventory. When he took his assessment, it revealed his primary gift to be administration. He said he really had hoped for a more exciting gift, so he took the assessment again. And then used a different assessment, trying for a new result the third time. Each time came out with the same result: administration. He was frustrated and disappointed to have what he perceived to be a boring gift. Then he led a mission team to South Africa. He discovered that he was the only member of the team who could keep all the details together, make all the connections, and be sure that the pieces fit together. He realized that without his gift, the rest of the team members would have been lost and confused. Without his gift, their gifts would not have been able to function. Even the gifts we think we don't want are absolutely essential for the church to be effective in its ministry to the world. Sometimes our gifts might not be as fun or as flashy as we wish them to be... But that doesn't make them any less valuable to God. All gifts are necessary. All gifts are needed for our church to work as effectively and efficiently as possible. Like that mission trip, where the travelers would have been lost and confused with out that man's administrative gifts, we are all needed.

The Gospel lesson we read today talked about how Jesus was willing to get his hands dirty as he served his disciples by washing their feet. This shocked the disciples – they were blown away by Jesus serving them in such a way. The example that Jesus set there and his closing line, “as I have done for you so you shall do for others,” reminds us of our calling to serve, to get our hands dirty and use our gifts or talents, our time and our heart, to serve others. If we want to experience the life that God intends for us, there comes a point where we shift from being merely recipients of grace to being channels of grace to others, a time when we no longer hold God's love for ourselves, but find ways to share it with others, a time when we stop being spectators and become participants in God's transformation of the world.

Through our baptism, we are commissioned to use our gifts to continue the servant ministry of Jesus. Each disciple has a role in the body of Christ. Every disciple is called, gifted, and needed in the ministry of the church. Frederick Buechner, an American writer and theologian, wrote about how we are called to serve God in his book, *Wishful Thinking*. He referred to our calling as a vocation, that area of service where God draws us. He said that there are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of society, say, or the superego, or self-interest. By and large a good rule for finding out is this: The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need to do and (b) that the world needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you've presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing cigarette ads, the chances are you've missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you're bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (a), but probably aren't helping your patients much either. He writes, “Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

We are part of a church here in Red Bank with many different places to plug in to service ministry, mission and outreach within the community. We are active in serving our community through the Backpack Crew, sending home food every single weekend for children who might not otherwise have access to a meal between Friday afternoon and Monday morning. We are active in our community through the feeding ministry of Lunch Break, through preparing meals for the Aids Center in Asbury Park, through the hospitality ministry of Family Promise, through the Crop Walk and many more organizations that bring transformation in the lives of others.

There are many different places to connect, to put your gifts and talents into action... the question is, “where does your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet?” What would bring you the most joy as you serve God and others? Might you want to serve on the ASP mission team? Or join in the next time we serve breakfast at Lunch Break? Or bring food with you the next time you come into the building, or **every time** you come into the building, and leave it in the grocery cart in the back hallway? Where is God calling you to serve, not

just through the church, but in your everyday lives? What are the gifts God has made in you that you are itching to put to use? I invite you now to take out the slip of paper you received in your bulletin and a pen or pencil to write with. We'll take two minutes to reflect individually on where our lives in service are today, jotting down notes on the Service Now side of your slip, and then turn it over to dream about how you might want to grow in your service in the year to come? What might God be calling you to serve on or with next? How might you live into your vocation through the church, or in your daily lives? Let's take two minutes to reflect and write, and then I'll draw us back together.