

Psalm 96

- 1 O sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.
- 4 For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.

- 5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
- 6 Honor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- 7 Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- 8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.

- 9 Worship the Lord in holy splendor;
tremble before him, all the earth.
- 10 Say among the nations, "The Lord is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity."
- 11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
- 12 let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
- 13 before the Lord; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

Romans 12:3-8

3 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 judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Alright! Let's begin this time together in the same fashion that we've begun the sermons over the past few weeks, by reciting our mission statement. This practice helps to center us, to remind us of God's mission amongst us, and to focus our reading of the scriptures today. Here at Christ Lutheran Church we're, "A fellowship living and sharing the love of God through worship, service, wellness, and hospitality." Today, we move from worship to service, and we hear from the Apostle Paul that we've each got a service to share. What's the importance of service amongst us here at CLC?

Whenever I think of the word service, a few things come to mind. The first is service professions, and in particular, food service. Though I never waited tables or

worked in a fast food place, as a kid I worked for my dad's meat packing plant. You could regularly find me bagging groceries at the front or cutting lunchmeats, wrapping short ribs, or tenderizing round steaks for customers out of the fresh case. Now, the one universal experience I had with anyone else who worked food service is that, in many cases, we were a temporary relationship of convenience. Whether people were smiling at us or glaring at us, typically the only thing they wanted was their food as fast as humanly possible, and the reason we were serving was to earn a paycheck. That's what service means in service professions, but that's not what service means in the church.

The other thing that comes to mind when I think of service is a tennis match. When I was young, my friends and I played tennis. Most of us weren't very good, and I was the least good of the not so good. Ok, I was just bad. But one of the ways that we made our bad skills fun was, when we

were serving the ball over the net, we'd scream, "SERRRRRRRVIIIIIIIIICE!" Of course, the goal of serving in tennis is to start the game, and if you serve it very well, to end it in the very same stroke. The goal of service in tennis is to win, but that's not what service means in the church.

What does service mean in the church? Paul tells us, in Romans 12, that, "In one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function...individually we are members one of another." Simply put, service in the church means to do our part to thrive together as the Body of Christ. We're not called to serve out of a convenient relationship, nor out of a desire to defeat one another. That's no service. Instead, service is using our God-given gifts for the betterment of others, for our mutual joy. Service is using our God-given gifts for the betterment of others, and that can bring us all joy.

To understand this part of Romans, we must remember that it begins with worship, and namely, spiritual worship, that we're called to be transformed by the renewing of our minds to please God with our very lives. When we're called to the different functions of the body, of Christ's Body, we're called to serving the needs of Christ's Body and the needs of God's creation. We become more like God in worship so we can live more like God as the Body of Christ.

Service is neither a fully internal nor fully external work for a church. Too often, churches focus on service as simply the prospect of internal maintenance. Sometimes this means only focusing on building upkeep and the rising costs of utilities. Sometimes it means operating more like a social club that only focuses on "insiders" or "members." Sometimes it means focusing solely on the past glory days or fretting about the unknown future. That's not service as Paul envisions it. That's not service of the Body of Christ.

Now, we need to do some of those things. We don't need to worry; in fact, Christ tells us not too! But God's given us gifts of space and structures, of people and programs, all of which we're called to care for, **so long as they support godly service through the Body of Christ.** And that's important. That's the rubric that guides our life together. Imagine the church as an engine that drives a car. It needs maintenance. That can't be ignored. But if all you do is work on the engine, you've got worn windshield wipers, no power steering fluid, broken seatbelts, and flat tires. You can't go anywhere, and even if you could, would be a difficult, reckless journey that would hurt rather than help others. We've all got a task to do, from the most public to the most private, from the dirtiest handiwork to the most pristine of office work. We've each got a work to do, and each work is vital to keeping our car, or our church, together.

This can often seem unfair because some people's service gets more praise or more attention. Yet, the value of the service we each do as members of Christ's body is all the same. Service is a matter of different function, not different value. Consider your worship experience on Sunday morning. If Joanna didn't clean, or Debbie didn't put together the bulletins and PowerPoints, if Rosemary didn't prepare the music, it wouldn't matter how excellent the sermon was. The worship experience would be incomplete. And if all these people do their jobs, but I don't do mine, the same is true. But this doesn't just apply to the staff. It applies to everyone, to every member of Christ's body.

Our health together as the Body of Christ depends on the level of our mutual commitment to service. Think about it. If the Rough Draught Coffee House, or Across the Spectrum, or Highlander Lutherans, or healing ministry, or

visiting our members who can't make it out to regular events, or giving rides to Jimmy or others and Fairview, or attending synod assembly, if these things didn't happen, our identity would falter. We do what we do, we share ourselves and our abilities as CLC, and in that way we strengthen one another in our spiritual journeys, those journeys that see God in everything and every good thing directed at God.

Service is also a matter of intentionality. The very core of service is doing what we do for someone else. Remember that we talked about worship as a place where we offer something to God and we receive unexpected grace? God shows up like that in service too! We find appropriate joy in service when we do it for someone else rather than ourselves. If the only reason we're doing healing services is to feel good about ourselves, then we're doing it wrong. The same goes for Sunday worship and council meetings and health kits for Lutheran World Relief. If all we want is to

feel good, we need to reorient our priorities. But if we want to bless someone else, and God's blessings overflow not just to the people we're serving but to us as well, then that's service. We're not seeking the blessing for ourselves, but seeking to share what God's given us so that others might know the joy we've found in our Lord.

That's where the example of food service, and even of bad tennis, while not exactly Christian service, really gives a wonderful image of the potential beauty of service. The best waiters and waitresses, the best fast food staffs, the best owners, are the ones who find joy in service, who find a purpose in what they do. When we played those tennis games as kids, the best games were the ones that we played not to win, but when we gave someone the chance to hit it back, to play the game, to have fun with one another. Service, when done for someone else, can bring true joy into our lives.

And through that joy, the Body of Christ grows. We may look around and see that we're not yet the best in certain areas of service. For instance, we still haven't made a deeper connection with the middle and high school here in Radford despite their close proximity. This could mean that we're called to grow ourselves, that someone in our midst has an as yet undiscovered gift. Or it could mean that, through our service to other members of the community, we're called to welcome new members into our leadership team, to actively evangelize and disciple others in our community who have a passion for Jesus and for ministry with teens. Either way, it means that we're called to growth in service.

Using Paul's imagery, if we don't have hands to connect us with God's work in the world, then we need to find some hands. If we don't have a heart to connect us with God's passion, then we need to find a heart. If we

don't have sinews tying us together and strengthening our bonds, then we need to find some tendons and muscles. We need to grow our body. Sometimes this means learning how to do new things ourselves, and sometimes this means making space for others to share their gifts and prowess as a part of the Body of Christ here at CLC.

That's a lot. I know. So how do we boil it down, to something simple? As we said before, service is using our God-given gifts for the betterment of others. Even more simply, we've all got something we can do, and we've got to do it for others instead of ourselves. And that can bring us true joy, the joy found in giving life to others. That's service, Christian service, the kind of service that reflects Jesus's life-giving sacrifice. He had something to give, and he gave it for us. He found the joy of the resurrection through it, but it wasn't done for him. It was done for you, and me. The

service of the cross is our guide in this life of service together.

Amen.