

## Do You Serve or Teach?

Romans 12:7

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Normally when people ask us who we are and what we are doing here we give our names and say, "I'm trying to make some kind of life for myself here in this society." So, we say, "I'm John" or "I'm Jean" and then we tell them what we do. Of course that is a lie that is not the truth. You are not just John Stevenson or Jean Graham trying to make a life for yourself here in society. You are, loved ones, a drop of Jesus' blood enclosed in your personality, wearing your body, come here to earth to complete his creation in some specific way. That is the truth.

You are a part, a little drop of the life energy that coursed through the body of Jesus the Son of the Creator. You are that little piece of life energy enclosed in your personality and wearing your body and come back here to this world to complete the creation, because it is not yet completed. That is who you are and that is what you are here to do. I have sat where you are sitting and listened to somebody say that kind of thing, and thought, "That is just high-sounding, philosophical, theological stuff. It isn't me." But it is, loved ones, that is truly what you are. That is the significance of your life.

I would point you again to John 1:4: "In him was life," and Jesus of course is the "him". The real translation of the Greek is in the footnote at the bottom: "was not anything made. That which has been made was life in him." Now you have been made, and what that verse says is that you are life in him before you came here. So in a way you are a part of Jesus' own life and you existed in him before you came here. You may say, "No, that is true of the great men or the great preachers or the great servants of God, but that is not true of me." Loved ones, you cannot get out of it. John 1:9: "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world." You are a man or you are a woman that has come into this world, and that light has lightened you, too, and that is who and what you really are.

That is why you have certain gifts. You don't have gifts for your own sake. I think that is where we go wrong. We say, "Who am I? What would God give gifts to me for?" You are dead right! You, on your own--it is not worth it. But it is Jesus in you that has come to earth and you have gifts that none of the rest of us have. That is what you find in Romans 12:6: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." All of us have gifts that God has given to his Son Jesus to exercise through you here in this world. Every one of us here has a certain gift.

Maybe it would be good to point out to each other again that there is a great diversity of gifts, because if you are like me, I sat where you are and thought, "Oh, yes, Graham has a gift of preaching, Beverly Shea has a gift of singing, somebody else has a gift of healing. I can see how there are many who have gifts, but me, I don't have a gift." I couldn't see because I couldn't see that I had the gift of healing or the gift of singing or the gift of preaching. Now, loved ones, there is a dear word in this book that speaks to you as you say that. I Corinthians 12:4: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit." The Greek word is "diabaseis" and it means "differences" of gifts. There are many different gifts. Just because you don't preach or sing or heal people, that doesn't mean you haven't a gift. There is a great variety of gifts.

Some of the gifts are in verse 8. These are the so-called "miraculous gifts." It is a dumb name for

it. Chesterton said, "Is it more miraculous for the sun to rise every day or for the sun to set early on the day of Christ's death?" Which is more miraculous? He pointed out that it is just as miraculous that the sun rises every day as that one day it set early when Jesus died. Both are equally miraculous. It is just that one happens every day, and we tend to call things miraculous when they don't happen every day. Actually a thing is miraculous because it happens through a power greater than our own. There are no miraculous and non-miraculous gifts; all gifts are miraculous. Here are some in verse 8: "To one is given through the-Spirit the-utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues."

Those are nine of the so-called miraculous gifts, but they are no more miraculous than these gifts that are mentioned in I Peter 4:9: "Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another." Some of us say, "Yes, that is just being good or kind." No. Look at the next verse. "As each has received a gift"--so hospitality is a gift-- "employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies." So there is a great variety of gifts, and God has given you one or some of those gifts.

Then turn back to I Corinthians 12:6. There it is good to see that not only is there a diversity of gifts: "And there are varieties of workings." You might have the gift of prophecy. I might exercise that gift up here preaching and you might exercise it as a shy, quiet counsellor sitting beside somebody, speaking the right word at the right moment to them. That is still the gift of prophecy, but there is a different way of working it or operating it. It is still Jesus inside you exercising the gift.

Loved ones, I think sometimes you short change Jesus because you have found yourself doing many things that are natural to you but you never think of it as a gift. Do you see that is what a gift is--something that is natural to you? It is funny, I would feel strange now coming in on Sunday morning and sitting down where you are. That is how natural this thing has become to me. That is how natural a gift becomes to you; it becomes the normal thing that you do. It is the same with you. You have things that you do naturally and easily and they are no problem to you. To the others of us it would be a grind. That is a gift that God has given you.

There is a further variety in verse 5: "and there are varieties of service." There are different ways to employ the gift of prophecy. You could employ it as a counsellor at school. Now I'm not saying that every counsellor is exercising the gift of prophecy. Most counsellors are exercising their own unaided wisdom or even at times some of the wisdom that comes from the other part of the spiritual world, but it is possible for someone who is in Jesus to actually exercise the gift of prophecy in a counselling situation, or to exercise it as a neighbor talking to another neighbor who comes in to have a cup of coffee.

In other words, there is a great diversity of gifts that God has given us and there are great diversities of the operating of the gifts, and then there are great diversities of areas or arenas of service where those gifts are exercised. It is very important for each one of us to see that we are part of that. Each one of us are a drop of Jesus' blood enclosed in our personality in our body and sent here with a certain gift from God that we can exercise in a way that is just right for us.

I would like to point out one central part of this whole thing, if you would look at it in I Corinthians 7:7. Here is how the gift differs in many cases. "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." You are a gift, you are different from me and you are different from the person sitting beside you. You are a gift in yourself, a unique gift. There is nobody like you.

So when a gift is exercised through you it takes on your particular character, and to that extent it is a different gift from what anybody else in the rest of the world exercises. Whether you speak a word of God to somebody quietly in a corner at work or whether you speak a word of God up here in testimony or whether you speak a word to someone in advice during your work every day, that gift is uniquely different from that gift exercised by any of the rest of us, because you yourself are a gift. You are different from all of us, so when you exercise a gift, even though it may be the same gift as many of the rest of us, it is exercised differently.

How will you ever find it out? There is only one way. It is certainly not by asking me, because I'm different from you. I don't know how to exercise the gift that you have. It is certainly not by asking other counsellors. They don't know. There is only One who knows--the little drop of blood inside you--Jesus. Jesus' Spirit in you knows what he intends to do on earth while you are alive, and he can tell you--he alone knows. That is why I'd urge you--listen to the preachers, read the books, but really they can take you only so far. Finally you have to go quietly to your Lord who is within you and say, "Lord Jesus, as I go through my life here loving you and wanting to please you, will you manifest through me the particular gift that you have to give this world?" Jesus will be faithful and as you keep your eyes upon him and keep living fully in him, so that gift will begin to be manifested.

Now I would love to talk about two of the gifts that God mentions in Romans 12:7. "If service in our serving." The word for service is "diakonia" in Greek. It becomes "deacon" or "deaconate" in English. It is a word that Paul uses when he talks about his ministry of being an apostle and a preacher and an evangelist. It is also the word that is applied to ministry to physical and bodily needs. It is the same word. God doesn't make a distinction in his mind between service that consists of what we call the spiritual gifts of preaching or praying or ministering God's Word and the kind of physical, material, secular gift of ministering to people's bodily needs. He uses the same word for both. Both are our diaconates or our service.

Now, of course, we happy human beings did our best to split them once in Acts. We got our efficiency experts going and decided, "Let's get this show on the road and get it organized." Acts 6:1: "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution." Obviously, you see, the thing was inefficient. "And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'" We think the big thing is what we do and how efficiently we do it.

Of course that is not what God is after at all. But right there we decided, "Let's split up, let's get the serving of the tables done by a group that are appointed to do that, and let's keep the guys who are preaching and praying doing that, and we will have efficiency here and in no time at all we will have the world converted." God didn't agree, as you can see in the next verse. "And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy

Spirit." He was the first deacon and he should have kept to his serving tables, but in verse 8: "And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people." Stephen would not stay in the place we gave him.

It was God saying kindly, "Now look, don't split the thing up into the spiritual service and the physical service. They are both the same." Actually, Stephen, who is appointed to do some physical service, distributing food to the widows and the others who were hungry, ended up preaching a most powerful Christian sermon and becoming the first Christian martyr and bringing probably God's greatest servant besides Jesus to himself--Paul. God was gently saying, "Don't split those things up. Don't divide up the secular and the sacred. Keep them both together." Loved ones, you and I need to see that. They are both equally the activity of that precious life of Jesus within us, whether it is so-called spiritual service or so-called materialistic or physical service; they are both equally vital in God's heart and mind.

Now how does service apply here among us? First of all, it is good to see that if you have the gift of service you had better get it out; you had better express it. You are in the same spot as me and as Jeremiah and Paul: "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." If there is some service that you can do and you are not getting it out, that service is actually the blood of Jesus wanting desperately to wash the feet of his dirty, weary, bedraggled world through you now. That Spirit of Jesus is bursting to get out of you, and if you don't let it out, it will turn back in on you and you will eventually frustrate yourself into ulcers. So first of all, it is vital to see that you need to get that out. It is interesting that it is not for the sake of all of us who are going to receive your service, but for your own sake, for the sake of your health and your own balance in God that you have to get that service out.

Secondly, it is probably good to see that it doesn't really matter what you do. Some of us think it is important what we do. No. The receiver of service from Jesus through some other human being is not actually preoccupied with what the service is, but is preoccupied with how you are giving that service to them. They are preoccupied with the thought, "You actually thought enough of me to do something for me!" That is what comes home to a person's heart through service. In a way, the joke about the Boy Scout leading the old lady across the road when she didn't want to go across the road is true. It doesn't actually matter so much what you do as the heart and the spirit with which you do it. That is the weakness of the United Fund. [ American charity to help and feed the poor in the USA] The United Fund is good, and we have to do something in a society like ours, but it is the limitation of social welfare, because actually loved ones who are in need, they need food, but they need something far more. Most of them really feel nobody cares about them at all. I think they appreciate Meals On Wheels, but they know it is a kind of organized thing. The beauty about service that comes from a person's heart who is in Jesus is, it is saying to the person, "I thought about you. I see you are a real, different person from me and I thought about you enough to think you might like this done."

The world is kind of falling apart through thoughtlessness, isn't it? Few of us feel anybody cares very deeply about us. It is even a problem with parents and children, isn't it? It is even a miserable problem with husbands and wives. Often that thought creeps into your mind, "Do they really care about me or do I fulfill a function?" Our world is falling apart through thoughtlessness, and every time thoughtfulness come out from your heart to somebody else, some other part of the world feels the touch of God's love. That is why there is actually only one way to practice your gift of service. You have to get to know other people. The beauty of service is it is unsought and unasked for. That is why you have to get to know the person next to you. Horrible though the thought is,

there is no other way around it. You have to get to know the person walking down the stairs beside you after the service. That is the only way, really, that you will get to know in what way you can serve them and that is what service is. You are sitting down and suddenly the Lord of life comes by with a towel over his arm and love in his eyes and starts to wash your feet. That is what service is.

Is there service? Yes, all kinds of service. A lot of us are lonely. We try to pretend we are not lonely and we put on the facade of being very busy and having no time to do anything, but actually a lot of us are lonely here. A lot of us sit home at night and we would love to go somewhere. We would love to come to all kinds of things here, but there is nobody who has ever shown an interest in us or given us a feeling that they are really interested in us and aren't just drafting us into something. A lot of us would like somebody to make a move towards us as a friend, a friend with disinterested love, with real care for us who wasn't out to get something from us. I think a lot of us have little things at home that need to be done. A lot of us have homes or apartments that need painting; a lot of us have hinges that need to be fixed on doors; a lot of us have little electrical things that need to be done; a lot of us have things that are wrong with our cars; a lot of us have all kinds of little things that Jesus knows, and Jesus in you is anxious to get to know in the other person. It takes thoughtfulness. It takes us to withdraw from this "I love you" stuff: "I love the whole world!" Forget the whole world, and just think about one little person here. Yes, there is a lot of service to be done for each one of us, but we won't ask you to do it. It wouldn't be real service if we asked you. Service is something that comes unsought and unasked for because of the overflowing and the bubbling out of Jesus' love from another person.

There are all kinds of practical things that need to be done among us. Into the ground floor flow the world of men and women every Monday through Saturday--a world of men and women, raw, tired and fed up with putting up a front to defend themselves, and desperately anxious, desperately open to some waiter or waitress or some hairdresser seeming to be really interested in whether they are enjoying a relaxing time there in the restaurants and stores. There is a lot of service to be done. There are loved ones in nursing homes that we visit, there are loved ones in prison that we visit--and in our society they have more things than they need. That is the strange thing. It is hard to die of hunger in our society. Except you can die of hunger for love in our society, because love is applying your own particular interest in detail to another person. That is what service is. There is all kinds of service to be done.

Look at the second part of Romans 12:7: "If service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching." Some of you have been schoolteachers--elementary school teachers, high school or college. Some of you have taught Sunday school; some of you have been pastors or counsellors. Some of you are painters and plumbers, some know electrical work, some are auto mechanics, some know how to sew, some of you can cook, some of you know how to bring up children, and some of you know a little about being married, some of you know how to counsel other people. Some of you are in the medical sciences and have experience there. Many of you have skills that other people want to learn and Jesus within you is so anxious to give that out. I know a bit more about this, because I was a schoolteacher and I think I am in some sense a teacher. I know that if you don't give that out, that will wither inside you and you yourself will begin to wither. There is teaching to be done.

If you say, "How could we do it?" It is obvious. We have a school here--Christian Corps Training School. There are about forty of us who teach part time. We offer about one hundred forty different theological subjects every year, and probably about forty non-theological subjects. There is room for another one hundred forty theoretical or practical subjects. We already teach things like guitar

and auto mechanics, but we could teach anything that you have the skill to teach. Our aim is to get ten thousand of us abroad for Jesus, and the whole Twin City area would respond to this kind of situation if all of you who have teaching skills would call John, the dean of the school, and say, "Look, would you be interested? I make hydrogen bombs!" But if you would call him and say, "I don't know if you would be interested, but I do this and I believe that I could teach this."

The interesting thing is, it doesn't really matter whether they can take a carburetor apart or not after your class. Do you see that? I don't know that my big aim in life was to make sure they knew the six soliloquies of Hamlet. I don't know that I was terribly concerned about whether they could diagram a sentence or not. What a teacher does is, he or she gets over his whole understanding of life to the other person. That is what is precious. That is the gift that you have to give them, and you can give it by teaching almost any subject you choose. There is a mass of people in the colleges in the Twin Cities and in the Twin Cities themselves who would respond to a school that offers not what we do, the one hundred eighty subjects, but three or four hundred different subjects. The beauty of it is, it brings you into contact with two or three or maybe one other person to whom you can begin to give something of Jesus within you through your subject.

Here is the amazing thing--the more you serve or teach, the more you will need to serve and teach. The more people who come to you to be served and taught, the more servers and teachers will catch the spirit from you. You will find the same as the little guy who instead of keeping the gift to himself went up to this man in the middle of the field and said, "I have some loaves and fishes. I give them to you"--and then he looked around in amazement and saw the loaves and fishes: had multiplied and--expanded and extended, and there were five thousand people eating his lunch.

That is why Jesus has given that gift to you. If you give it away, you will find five thousand people receiving it, and then they will be giving it to somebody else. If your gift is service, then serve. Start now. Give somebody flowers or bake a pie and give it to somebody. Do something for somebody outside yourself. Break out of yourself. Serve. If your gift is teaching, then teach. Call John this week and say, "I can do this. Do you think you can use me?" Loved ones, if God is going to get ten thousand abroad it will take every one of us doing all that we can. Is that the big deal? No. It doesn't really matter if we get ten thousand abroad or not. What does matter is that Jesus has his full way in your life and heart and that you live a full life. It is important that you live fully and give out what is inside you.

I pray that you would all see the importance of giving your service, your knowledge, your time so Jesus can be fully formed in you. Will you do something? Think about it. Think about doing something this week.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that those golden words of oratory came from your lips. You also kneel down at the feet of some men taking a towel and basin to wash their feet. Lord, thank you. Thank you for wanting to do that again here in each one of us here. Thank you, Lord, if we don't let you do it, then there will be someone who will never be touched the way you planned for them to be touched.

Lord, Jesus, we would bring before you our loaves and fishes this morning. We would thank you for the gift and ability to serve other people -- to do things for them that will make their bodies more comfortable and make their life better.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of teaching whereby we can share our enthusiasm with somebody else. Lord, we commit ourselves this week to serve and to teach that you may be fulfilled in us and we may be fully built up in you.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of our Father in heaven and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us throughout this week.