

Bit Players?

God's House Calls:

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

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When I planned this series of messages, I thought of doctors' house calls. I felt God wanted me to share both how God is visiting your life and what your role is. We have trouble with that. We have trouble recognizing God's visitation. Even though "*In him we live and move and have our being,*" we frequently fail to recognize his presence, see his hand or hear his voice. I was stunned by a message God gave Isaiah about the people of God. Read this with me, please.

Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the Lord? You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing. (Isaiah 42:18-20, NIV)

God says that people committed and serving him our blind and deaf. They have good eyes and ears, but they pay attention to the wrong things. Jesus' brothers and mother struggled with this. They became convinced that Jesus was out of his mind. In Mark 3, we read:

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." (Mark 3:20-21, NIV)

They didn't see, they didn't hear, they didn't believe. A few verses later, we read:

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." (Mark 3:31-32, NIV)

This is when Jesus asked the crowd, “Who are my mother and brothers?” He told the crowd that they are his family if they do God’s will. Indeed, we, who obey God, are God’s house, the family of God, the body for Christ’s Spirit. We are God’s house, and there are calls made by God’s house. It was God’s house that came around Mary the mother of Jesus in the crucifixion. It was the call of God’s house that helped two of Jesus’ brothers, James and Jude, become apostles and writers in the New Testament. It is important for us not to miss God’s call to our house, and it is also important to respond to the call of God’s house, the body of Christ.

Take your Bibles and turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12. It is page 887 if you are using the Pew Bibles. In the 11th chapter Jesus rebukes these Corinthian believers for their divisions that are especially visible when they eat the Lord’s Supper. In the 12th chapter it becomes apparent that they are divided over the work of the Holy Spirit among them. The believers have difficulty recognizing the Spirit’s words and deeds. If it is outside their comfort zone or their current belief system, they divide over it. That must be the case in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, or why would we be told in those verses that there are different gifts, services and ways (or results), but the same Spirit, Lord and God are at work in them all? These different gifts, services and ways are temptations to divide, to separate. Now let’s read verse 7:

A spiritual gift (or manifestation of the Spirit) ***is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.*** (1 Corinthians 12:7, NLT)

I inserted that more literal translation of spiritual gift because I want you to see that our gifts, works and ways of faith are signs of God’s visitation among us. They are manifestation or visible expressions. I don’t imply that every act of faith is completely pure, but they are signals from God to benefit everyone. Moreover, we learn in verse 11 that the Holy Spirit is the only one who distributes these gifts and alone decides which person shall serve the church and

humanity in this way. Consequently, if we separate from people, whose Christian faith challenges our belief system and disrupts our comfort, we miss the benefit that God offers us. More than that, we lose our health. We suffer spiritual diseases that cripple, dwarf or even kill our life with God.

From the beginning of the church, God created unity where division prevailed. Do you remember doctrinal and emotional divisions between the Samaritans and Jews? Jesus included the Samaritans in his ministry to the “lost sheep of Israel,” but the disciples had questions. In Acts 8, Philip preached in Samaria and God gave him many converts. However, no one received the Spirit of God even when they were baptized with water. There was no sign of God among them other than their confession, and submission to Jesus. No one received the Spirit until the leaders from the Jerusalem church, Peter and John, came to Samaria, prayed for them and then laid hands on them. The spiritual health of the Samaritans depended on receiving ministry from people they didn’t like, people from whom they felt rejection. They couldn’t even get started with God until they let go of their pride and fear, and received ministry from people who had hurt them. No division or separation was allowed.

Now, let’s read together 1 Corinthians 12:12:

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12, NLT)

God Spirit points us to our human anatomy and physiology to understand our role and responsibility in God’s visitation. We are made to be fitted and functioning with other believers. In human physiology, the blood takes our breath to every organ and cell of the body, but if the cells and organs are not fitted and functioning in the body, they become diseased and die. We can suffer diseases a long time. Often, one disease weakens us so that we are vulnerable to other

diseases. Our health becomes fragile, and something takes us down that others, who are fully connected, easily survive. The truth is we need each other to embrace the work of God among us. You are not a bit player, neither is any other believer? Say to the person next to you, *“I’m not a bit player and neither are you. The Spirit says we need each other.”*

The problem is that we do separate as if we don’t need each other. Within congregations we separate because of our comfort or discomfort with one another. We separate as we develop different opinions or experience uncomfortable encounters. Among congregations and denominations, we separate over the practices and understanding of baptism. We separate over the practices and understanding of spiritual gifts. We separate over styles and practices of worship. We segment off into traditional Protestant, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, and Pentecostal. It grieves me that 500 years after Martin Luther protested certain doctrines, we are still known as Protestants rather than an expression of one Church. Does Christ’s church in Rochester ever unite in prayer, worship, or proclamation of Christ? We are diseased by division, but lately I’m heartened by the hunger for unity in pastors and priests.

In 1 Corinthians 12 we read that some of our human anatomy is unseemly and best clothed or covered in honor. Parents know that the unseemly parts have important life-giving-and-sustaining functions, but can require noxious diaper changes. I’m not sure what the spiritual application to this is. Perhaps, there are stinkers in the Body of Christ, and we do not embrace God fully until we with discretion honor them and honor their role in our lives. They are not bit players. As you read the Bible, you learn that God uses stinkers to accomplish his will. (I think Jacob and Samson qualify. At the least, they were guilty of unseemly behavior.)

How then do we respond to this truth to live and work as one body? **First, do not disown anyone, who trusts in Jesus Christ for their salvation – regardless of doctrines,**

denomination or actions, **as a brother or sister in Christ**. Jesus taught in a parable that the weeds grow with the wheat. The harvest angels sort out our family. We don't. **Second, honor one another.** In word and deed, honor one another. Marriages and all relationships thrive on honor and die without it. Honor gives energy to relate and work together. Dishonor saps our energy and leads to separation. If you think about the gifts you have in each other, your speech and deeds will build one another. If you focus only on problems and deficits, you will tear down the people you love. You'll discourage them. Say to the person next to you, "You are a gift to me." **Third, speak the truth in love.** Problems unattended get worse. We are not to tolerate everything. We all sin, and sin is cancerous. It destroys our lives and relationships. Express your hurt, fear, difference or concern. Speak the truth, but do it in love, not judgment. Do it to build. Do it to encourage. Do it to humbly witness. If you work on a problem in a relationship, make sure every step gives honor and encouragement. Speak words of blessing like: "*You can do this. God's at work in you to do what we think is impossible.*" Make sure you don't discourage people with degrading words, and don't write off their value to you. The Bible teaches that we enter into unity by sharing one Spirit, and that we grow that unity as we speak the truth in love. **Fourth, both receive and offer ministry.** The more you receive in ministry the more you can give, and it is a greater blessing to give than receive. You can't give what you haven't received. If you haven't received love, you don't know how to give it. However, when you give what you have, you double the joy you had in receiving. You also grow your faith and life. You are no bit player! **Finally, give thanks continuously.** Thanksgiving is the appropriate response to gift, to grace. Grace is what we are receiving in God's house calls .