

A sermon presented by David Hensel on 6/16/2019 at Rock River Presbyterian Church

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours; yours are the only hands through which He can do His work, yours are the only feet with which He can go about the world, yours are the only eyes through which His compassion can shine forth upon a troubled world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

This quote is attributed to St. Teresa of Avila, some 400 years ago – though there is some question as to the origin of the prayer. None the less, it is a powerful message. And the words are probably familiar to most of you, some more than others. The teens who participate in Fellowship will recognize them from the framed versions in the Fellowship rooms. It has come up in numerous messages during the “Time with Our Children” portion of our services. It had come up in a number of discussions throughout the Vitality & Renewal Initiative and became a foundation of the Vision for Rocky River Presbyterian Church, adopted by your Session, that states:

“We are united in the belief that we are Christ's body on earth, and we aspire to live every day as Jesus did. Through faith, community and mission, we strive to positively affect those we meet every day and those in the world.” In that Mission, we hope to achieve:

- An Environment that Bridges Generations;
- Vibrant participation in Worship and Mission;
- Creating an Inclusive Community of Faith;
- A Voice Advocating for Justice (What Would Jesus Do?), and;
- Faithful Stewardship of God’s Resources for Future Generations.”

As a congregation we have adopted this Call, and as such have entered a new period of reflection, vision and accountability. In the June issue of “The Pulse”, you’ll find published a summary of Session Committee goals and objectives for the coming year. As an example, you will further see highlighted the work of the Mission Committee led by Matt Pedone – who have truly embraced our call - in spearheading a monthly initiative and providing information on the “Mission Wall”. And you can expect a report on progress and next steps toward all of these committee goals and objectives at next years’ annual meeting.

And while your Session, Board of Deacons, RRPC Staff and many of the informal organizations are in a period of reflection, it’s appropriate that each of us – individually – take this Sabbatical period to examine and reflect on our own Gifts & Talents – to reflect on how we will use them in our Community of Faith, in our Communities, and in the World – it starts with each and every one of us. We are stewards of the Gifts God has given us.

Now, in that reflection, the two Gospel offerings that Michael read would seemingly appear to be in conflict. In the 5th Chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, we hear that:

“No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead it is put on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. Your light must shine so that people will see the good things you do.”

But later, in the 6th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we hear:

“Don't perform your religious duties in public so that people will see what you do. When you give something to a needy person, do not make a big show of it. Do it in such a way that even your closest friend won't know about it.”

So, on one hand, we're instructed to let our light shine so that others can see our good deeds. But then, we're told to perform our acts in secret, secure in the fact that God will see and reward our good deeds. So, what are we to do – how are we to go about our service in God's name?

I've wrestled with this seeming contradiction, and I am sure that there are many ways to interpret these passages relative to each other. I've come to believe that it is the humble, quiet contributions of individuals that enable the light of the church shine forth.

Let me share some examples of what I mean:

Last week we Ordained and Installed Ruling Elders and Deacons – individuals who have stepped forward to share their perspectives, experience and gifts to advance the mission of our Faith Community. These individuals are the hands, feet, and eyes of the congregation. These individuals don't do all the work themselves – they serve as a resource and provide opportunities for us to use our gifts and talents to help our Faith Community shine. They are the leaders who coordinate some very visible activities, including:

- Those individuals who serve as Ushers, making sure that the Sanctuary (Chapel) is prepared for worship, who welcome fellow parishioners and guests alike, and make sure the critical task of ensuring there are no Communion cups still in the pews the next week is accomplished.
- Those individuals who share their gifts as Liturgists, lending fresh voice, diversity and variety to portions of our Worship service each week.
- They coordinate those cross-generational mission activities here at RRPC and in the greater community.

Likewise, our leaders participate in and coordinate a lot of activities behind the scenes:

- Those individuals who coordinate transportation and deliver home Communion for those who are shut in.
- Counters who lend accountability to the financial reporting of our church.
- Heck, those who serve us coffee and donuts during our time of fellowship – someone's probably down in the kitchen as we speak.

And there are other very visible examples of individuals bringing forth their gifts in concert with the staff of our Church:

- Glen Loeffler leads the choir and handbell choir, and Hilary Watts shares her considerable talent in leading the childrens choir. But they don't do it all alone. Thank you to those

individuals who share their musical talents – vocal and instrumental – to provide music offerings to all of us as a Community of Faith, and to God above. I move around the sanctuary, and maybe your musical gift is a new way for you to add to the life of this congregation. A nod, too, to those individuals like myself who recognize that their gift is not to inflict their vocal skills on the congregation.

- Lisa Watts coordinates adult, children and young adult Christian Education. But she doesn't do it alone. Thanks to the individuals who step forward to lead those educational efforts. Those individuals who volunteer in the Nursery, provide the children's message during service, teach Sunday school and Adult Ed, who serve as advisors to our youth groups. And thanks to those who serve as Mentors to our Confirmands. It's a result of those efforts that our young adults are actively engaged in the life of this church. It's a result of those efforts that about 100 youth adults just helped out with our Vacation Bible School program with St. Christopher Parish. It's a result of those efforts that our congregation has the largest contingent of youth from our Presbytery attending this year's Triennium conference (9 from our congregation, and later this summer you will hear directly from them about their experiences).
- Likewise, a significant number of individuals – humbly and quietly – provide volunteer support for Crystal, Dave, Jim and Halle. Thanks to those of you who provide office support, count and record the offering, assist in groundskeeping, and countless other support roles.

Some individuals have chosen to bring their vocation into play, recognizing that they have gifts and talents valuable to this (and any) organization. Thank you to those individuals with backgrounds in finance, human resources, social work, teaching, communications, construction – any number of fields – who provide functional guidance and perspective to our ministry.

For example, Sally Schriener is a professional marketing officer with considerable skills in digital marketing, recognized as one of Crain's Cleveland Business 2019 Notable Women in Entrepreneurship. Sally has chosen to use her professional gifts to assume responsibility for content of RRPC's on-line presence – our website and Facebook pages. As such, she has quietly and humbly used her expertise to highlight RRPC in the community. To quote Jon Fancher's remarks in her Crain's profile, "Her skills in marketing and communications allow her to bring keen, invaluable insight to our effort to assure our church's relevance to the needs of today's world."

So, there are many avenues and resources you can bring to bear as you reflect on your gifts and talents, and how you may choose to offer them in the future. But one of the most compelling examples I can think of is the individual in our Congregation who takes it upon themselves to ensure that the vestments on the front of the Pulpit are appropriate for the liturgical period and, who... Ensures that the candles on the altars have oil in them so that – literally and figuratively – our churches light can shine forth. No recognition required (or, truthfully, desired), just an individual quietly and humbly doing their thing – their simple task – so that the experience of worship at RRPC can bring forth light.

Reflect on that! Most, if not all, of us make a stewardship commitment of financial support to RRPC. My challenge - to myself and to you during this Sabbatical period - is to reflect on your gifts and

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talents, and how you might make a commitment to advancing the mission of our community of faith. To reflect on how you may humbly serve in order for the light of RRPC to shine forth within, in our community, and in our world. I would remind you of the words we shared together just last week as we Ordained and Installed Ruling Elders and Deacons:

“God works through different persons in different ways, but it is the same God whose purpose is achieved through them all. Each one is given a gift by the Spirit, to use it for the common good. Together we are the body of Christ, and individually members of Him.”

COMMISSION TO SERVE INTRO

St. Teresa’s prayer is a charge to us collectively and individually. I invite you to join voices as Michael leads us in our Commission to Serve – with just slight modification of the text to take the words from a call to words we embrace as a Community of Faith.

COMMISSION TO SERVE

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