

Proper 13 B RCL

Trinity, Bend

Ephesians 4: 1-7,11-16

John 6:24-35

There is a story about Michelangelo pushing a huge piece of rock down the street. A curious neighbor sitting lazily on the porch of his house called to him and inquired why he labored so over an old piece of stone.

Michelangelo is reported to have answered, "Because there is an angel in that rock that wants to come out"

This story comes to mind when I think of the various gifts or talents that are here. Saint Paul would say those are the things you use to shape your ministry. We used to think of ministry as something that the priest or deacon does. It was the work of the minister.

But if you look closely at today's lesson from Ephesians. It says that "Christ's gifts were that some should be apostles, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ," to **equip the saints for the work of ministry.**

The saints are the baptized members of a church so the work of ministry belongs to all of the baptized members of the church.

A question in the catechism at the back of the Book of Common Prayer says it even more clearly. The question "Who are the ministers of the Church?" "The ministers of the church are the lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons."

Notice the first ministers listed are the lay people. That was intentional.

Your ministry is the most important. All of them are needed but you are the most important.

Your ministry in the world is the most difficult. And the most vital. Let's look at ministry. And your empowerment to be ministers.

Paul talks about the qualities of a minister, in today's lessons. These are all things that we need to work on constantly. I don't know about you but I consider this a life-time quest.

The first is humility, Christian humility begins to evolve when a person compares his or her life to the life of Christ and begins to accurately assess the demands of God. True humility is not kowtowing but an acknowledgment of the need for conversion and a trusting in the power of God's grace to transform who we are into who we are to become.

When we're humble we depend on God for everything. Rather than say, "I can do it myself and I don't need any help" humility calls us to say "This is more than I can handle by myself. This is one for God."

One of the little ways to develop humility is to be around others doing some of the mundane, thankless tasks, like putting away chairs, tending the flower gardens, or doing the dishes. Someone in this parish actually claimed doing the dishes as his ministry here.

Another quality of a saint or minister is meekness or gentleness. A gentle person is not a milquetoast. A gentle person is kindled by indignation at the wrongs and sufferings of others, but is not moved to anger by the wrongs or insults he or she has to bear.

This can only come from surrender to the power of God. It's not easy not to get angry when you've been wronged. It sometimes helps to look at things from God's perspective.

Patience or long suffering is that quality of the spirit that never gives into weakness.

St. John Chrysostom defined patience as “the spirit that has the power to take revenge but never does so.” Patience does not retaliate. It is the spirit that bears insult and injury without complaint.

St. Paul describes patience when he talks about how God treated him. When he says; “I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience, as an example for those who would believe in him and have eternal life.” (I Tim. 1:16)

You must admit it took a lot of patience for Jesus to convert Paul. It was Paul who was out murdering those who believed in Jesus.

The last of these virtues is love. Agape is a type of love that moves beyond physical, friendly and even familial love and beyond emotion. It is a virtue of the will, mind, and heart which always seeks the ultimate benefit and welfare for the other without reciprocity.

In other words it is **loving the other person 1000% expecting nothing in return**. God is the only one who fully lives into that but we can try.

When we try to live out these virtues we become ministers in our daily lives. It's when you go to work and find that some other person got the promotion you had hoped for and you can congratulate them honestly.

Or when you have a lot of work to do and another person stops by your office to tell you about their terrible week-end. And you care enough to put your agenda on the back burner for a while.

Love is getting a vaccine for COVID so that others do not get sick, not just to protect yourself.

Or when someone calls and say's so and so is in trouble could you pray for them. And you spend your day in prayer as you go about your other business.

I remember talking to a bus driver who said, "Driving this bus is a ministry, I try to greet each person as if they were Christ himself. And when someone cuts me off in traffic I say a prayer for them." That's a different attitude than some of us have when we're behind the wheel.

Or the teacher who walks into the classroom who remembers that Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me." And prays that God will open minds today.

Ministry can happen in such ordinary tasks as going to the grocery getting the things out of the cart so the bar code is easy to find and smiling at the clerk who rings out your groceries. (Yes, a person can tell you are smiling, even when you are wearing a mask)

The Celtic people had a wonderful way of incorporating God into their daily life. They had prayers for everything from the prayer to be said while washing your face in the morning, to the prayer to say while making the bed. The prayer to say while milking the cow. Or the one to say when going to bed.

When you say that many prayers you learn that God is with you in all that you do and the daily things become ministry . That is the way that Christianity will change the world.

Sure we have to attend church on a regular basis. Some would say “church is like a gas station. It is the place we stop by to fill the tank so we can go about doing the real work of ministry.” The ministry of God in the world.