

I Want To!

A sermon based on 1 Corinthians 12:12-25.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now, this is a little before my time, but I'm guessing many of you fondly remember *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*. There was this popular segment he frequently had...do you know it? It was Carnac the Magnificent, who would clairvoyantly divine the answers to questions contained in sealed envelopes. Like, for instance:

- Debate – what do you use to catch de fish?
- Sis boom bah – describe the sound made when a sheep explodes.
- Three dog night – what's a bad night for a tree?

Now, I won't dress up in all of Carnac's garb, but I have a sealed envelope with a question in it today, and I think I know the answer. Jonah, Jeremiah, Moses. *Name three servants of God who were less than willing to and do God's bidding.*

In fact, they ran the other way, piled up excuses for God, even played the youth card, "I'm too young to go...***I'm only a child.***" And we, who'd like to think of ourselves as being a bit more spiritually mature, can look at those three men and say, "That's exactly how you're acting, like little children." Because isn't that what little kids...and even older kids do sometimes? Clean your room...But I don't want to. Take out the trash...I don't want to. Turn the TV off and finish your homework... I don't want to. Eat your veggies...I don't want to.

Is that us sometimes, too?

The Corporation for National Community Service, in a 2016 study, found that in the US, there were 62.8 million volunteers who averaged 32.1 service hours for the year, which amounted to 7.9 billion volunteer hours, the equivalent of \$184 billion worth of work.

Impressed? That's a lot! But I have one more number for you. And that's 25.3%. That's the percentage of Americans who actually volunteer. Maybe not so impressive anymore, is it?

And you might be thinking, "But look at what's happening down in Texas with Harvey. People and communities (even from outside of Texas and even the US) coming together to aid and support and help a lot of people in their hour of need." But is that an outlier situation? Wait until tragedy strikes to get involved? I don't know.

What I do know is we're not immune to the kind of thinking that hesitates – even if just for a moment – at the opportunity to volunteer or to serve...asking ourselves questions like "What's the time commitment involved?" "What do I have to give, or what am I going to have to sacrifice?" "What am I going to get out of it?"

We're not beyond Moses or Jonah or Jeremiah or other less-than excited or willing believers in Scripture when it comes to serving and doing God's work. We're a body of believers here, a family of believers here, but what's your instinctive response when volunteer opportunities arise?

I'll tell you some of mine (and I know, they're weak, sorry excuses, but here they are): "I am already doing so many other things here, why can't someone else pick up the slack and do that?" "I'm always tired and worn out after work or after a long week of work, and now, to add that to my plate?" "I don't have time for that (which, roughly translated, means, "I don't want to make time for that.*)" "What I'm being asked to do, almost anyone else can do that, so I'm sure someone else will get on that." "No one asked me specifically to help out with that, so I'm assuming they didn't want or need me for it." "I've helped out with this or that before, put in all that time and effort, and not one 'Thank You' or sign of appreciation, so now I don't really feel motivated to help."

This one's not mine yet, but I've heard it in various settings, "I put in my time, now it's time for the younger people to get more involved," almost as if you signed this contract with God that only lasted up to a certain age, and now you get to ride the pine for the rest of your days (although – spoiler alert – you'll be spending your entire eternity working for Jesus...**"they serve him day and night in his temple"** is how Revelation puts it).

You see what all of those statements are, don't you? Yes, excuses, but, even more than that, all of that, God says "Serve," and our response, too many times (even if it's been just once), our response has been, "I don't want to." And, as I'm guessing many of you parents so much very dislike hearing your kids say that, imagine how that sounds to God's ears.

And, not that this should bring you any comfort, but this is a problem nearly every church in our church body, in the WELS, deals with. Every call I've held, every pastor I've talked to has lamented over the reality of lots of work to do and never enough volunteers...or the whole cliché of 10% of the people doing 90% percent of the work.

Why is that? Well, as you saw from the national statistics, it's not just a WELS' problem. It's a sin problem...it's me thinking about and caring most of all about me instead of we and definitely instead of God.

It's being part of the body of Christ, as Paul writes about here in 1 Corinthians 12, and each of us having different God-given gifts and abilities to contribute to the well-being of the body as a whole, and then, whatever the reason, we're not functioning as we should. And Paul tells us the consequence, **"If one part suffers, every part suffers."** One "I don't want to" is a wrench thrown in the gears of the well-oiled machine of the body of Christ, and this body suffers.

So much for a thank you to our volunteers, right?!?! But isn't the unfortunate reality...and even for me. We all give service, but it's not perfect service. Our faith in Jesus is chomping at the bit to produce fruits of faith and burst forth with works of service for Jesus, and we, for whatever reasons, we reign it in. There's room for improvement. So, what's the solution?

Take a page from the book of the greatest Servant who ever served...

You know, for starters, to even be in this position – a member of the body of Christ – is, by itself, a clear display of the grace of God. Think back to our gospel. As the disciples were in the midst of arguing about who should be the greatest in heaven, Jesus brought them down to earth with his humbling words, **"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

And his life was the clearest and greatest display ever of humble service...and you know it. Where the Bible says, ***“Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others,”*** that was Jesus, who lived every moment of his life with care and compassion, looking for ways to show God’s love and to serve the physical and spiritual needs and interests of others. And he did it perfectly.

And then, that humility extended to his death, where Jesus put our eternal needs above even his own life. Paul tells us that ***“very rarely will anyone (even care to) die for a righteous man.”*** Where we sometimes haven’t been willing or eager to sacrifice so much as our time for the interests of others, Jesus gave himself to serve our best interests by giving his life on the cross as a ransom for us...sinful people.

And finally, Jesus rose, came back to life to show us what he accomplished for our greatest good...a place in heaven with him for eternity. And the best part of all this? He wanted to. For you, he wanted to!

That’s the solution. For our imperfect service, God countered with perfect service in Jesus, his life, his death, and his resurrection.

And now, that’s the benchmark for us when it comes to our service. God tell us, “be faithful,” and this is what it looks like...knowing, acknowledging, and trusting in God’s great love, shown in Jesus, our Head, and in his humble service...and then getting out of your own way so those fruits can start flowing...and so this body can function at the highest degree.

And here’s the second-best news of the day (I just shared with you the best)...you’re already doing it. I want to try something fun this morning. I’m going to list off a number of different areas of service here at Light of the World. If I mention something you’ve done in the past year, stand up and keep standing.

Council...SS teachers...Choir...Serving on any of the ministry teams...Ushers...VBS (including set-up and take down, donating items, helping with decorations)...Snow Removal...Visiting shut-ins...Women’s group...Snacks...Food for potlucks...Cleaning...Putting up decorations/helping with maintenance projects...

Now, I want you to raise your hand if you did it because someone made you or told you that you had to.

You know, I just listed off things that, outside of my duties here as pastor, probably make up 95% of the ministry here at Light of the World. Do you understand what that means? Without you, we don’t. We can’t. Without you, Light of the World cannot exist as it is today. Without you, this probably would have ended long ago.

You are the body of Christ...different members, different functions, different gifts, different areas of service...but one body working...serving together for one mission: to show the love of Jesus....because you want to.

Now, unfortunately, that’s not the feeling all the time. So, how can we get even better with our service? Well, when you don’t want to or don’t feel like serving, read God’s Word.

It’s kind of like the effect going to a wedding or celebrating an anniversary can have on a marriage. I’m embarrassed to admit, I don’t always feel like showing love to my wife...helping out and doing my share of the household chores, giving her the back massage when she asks for it, spending five minutes talking

to her when I'd rather be watching what's on TV or when my focus is on whatever project I'm working on.

But attending another wedding, hearing those vows...celebrating an anniversary, remembering my vows...it's a reminder...she is God's gift to me. I'm not worthy of her. I don't deserve her. But God, in his love, has given her to me. And the way I can thank him is by the love I show to her through the works of service I do for her.

Our service God and to the body of Christ here is no different. His Word reminds us how this family is God's gift to you (and we see the lengths he went to to make it so), and that's enough to motivate us and remind us...we love to serve the Lord. Instead of being like parents who usually have to threaten or bribe their kids to get chores done, God simply tells us who we are. We are his, and we long to serve.

That means getting/continuing to get out onto the field and getting dirty...getting involved. I have this problem where I'll be watching one of my favorite sports teams, and then I'll be talking to other people, saying things like, "All we have to do to win the next game," or, "Here's what we're doing wrong," and they'll say, "We?!? You're not out there, digging in the trenches, playing with them. You're sitting in the stands."

I hope you would all identify this as "my church." And I don't have a problem with you saying, "Here's what we're doing," but I hope that you want to put in the sweat equity as well, looking for ways (maybe even more ways) to serve and volunteer...to really make this your church...your family.

32.1 hours per year. That's what the almost 63 million volunteers in the US are giving, on average, per year. Obviously, one would never expect all of those hours to be given to the church. But I would certainly pray that you'd want to give some of it to Jesus...to his family here...to his glory.

Because that's the end goal. If you've seen Moana, you know one of the most popular songs is "Your Welcome," where the demigod Maui lists off all he's accomplished...for the people, because he's fishing for the compliment, the "Thank You!"

Your labors of love for your Lord don't go unnoticed. I'm sorry if I don't always say thank you when you've done something here. And I know one breakfast a year isn't even close to thanking you for your service. You are needed. You are appreciated. And, whether I take note of it and respond to it or not, whether we celebrate it or not, God sees it...and his response is, "**Well done, good and faithful servant.**"

What we do is our thank you to God for his service to us. What we do for God is all about bringing glory to him. And, if that's the reality, we want to. We're happy to. We will...our "thank you" to God. Amen.