

Re-Set: *Make It Do What It Do*

Romans 12:3-8

On this Martin Luther King weekend, I have thought of his friend, the late and great Ray Charles who sang so often at his rallies. Ray Charles gave testimony to how his association with Dr. King beginning in 1963 changed him from focusing so much on himself to focusing on how he could bring benefit to others. This eventually led him to found the Ray Charles Foundation, a foundation that was established to help those who have hearing disabilities. That's rather ironic because, as you surely know, Ray Charles could not see.

This past week, I decided to find out why Ray Charles chose to help those who could not hear. He said that, as a musician, he never felt that blindness was a disability for him. That does not mean that he did not need help from others to navigate things in this world. But, he felt that to be hearing impaired would have been far more disabling for him in his calling. The slogan he chose for his foundation was "*make it do what it do.*"

<http://weknowmemes.com/generator/uploads/generated/g1384886665193479626.jpg> By that, he meant that he wanted other people's ears to be able to do what he thought they should do, i.e., to hear.

As I thought about the Bible passage we come to this weekend, I think that title is a good one for God's call to have all the parts of the body – which is the way the New Testament often refers to the church – do what they are supposed to do. You see, each person who enters into "the body of Christ" through faith in Jesus is referred to as a body part. And, just as Ray Charles knew that both eyes and ears have a role to play in the functioning of our physical bodies, so too each church member has an essential role to play in the body of Christ. And, the Apostle Paul, whom God inspired to write this part of the Bible, seemed to be convinced that some of the people in the churches in Rome were not exercising the parts God had gifted them to play in the church body – and, it may also have been that some church folks were not letting people utilize the gifts God had given them.

So, in our series entitled "Re-set", I've become convinced that we need to listen carefully to this passage in God's Word and re-set our ministries here at LAC with a view to using all the gifts that God gives to our church body. This text has played a central role in how I think about the functioning of a church. The biblical principle is this: **God does his work in the church by giving us different gifts, each of which is essential to the life of the body and then telling us to use them to serve one another.**

Based on Rom 12:3-8, I'm going to give us two challenges: 1) To you individually I want you "to make it do what it do", i.e., to serve here at LAC in keeping with your Spirit-given gifts. 2) To us corporately, I call us all to encourage others to serve as God's Spirit gifts them; in other words, "to let it do what it do." So, first, "make it do what it do," and, second, "let it do what it do."

#1: **Make It Do What It Do** – *If your gift is... then...*

When God freezes water, He makes a snowstorm – every flake unique. <https://wonderopolis.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/image1.jpg> When we humans freeze water, we make ice cubes – each one molded into the same cube form. <https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/81tYA6PoHAL.SL1500.jpg>

This is one fundamental way that God is different from us. When we want to bring about something unified, we usually try to make everyone alike. That's not always bad. The military has its soldiers cut their hair; wear the same uniform. But... this isn't the kind of unity God wants in the church body. That's more like uniformity.

In the global eternal family God is creating, he creates unity by making everyone different. God makes it so that no one person is complete in and of himself/herself. So, we all need the rest of the body in our spiritual lives. We cannot grow fully, i.e., we cannot become all God would have us to be – on our own. We cannot be the kind of church God would have us to be if we don't all function in keeping with the gifts God gives us.

It's almost as if God called us to himself "*while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:8)*," rescued us, put us into a local church body, and then said, "There! They'll have to love one another and serve one another. They can't grow – they can't even live well – unless they do."

What is this like? As I listened to the Lee Trio (<http://www.belenzon.com/images/images/the-lee-trio.jpg>) playing this morning, I thought that what they did musically is a lot like the way a church is to function. We heard three different instruments – violin, cello and piano -- each playing a part of critical importance to the piece of music. They often played different musical/melodic lines. There were different points of entry. But there was a unity. These varying and complex parts all came together to form the beautiful multi-tonal harmonies and lines of the music. They could have said, "I'm not going to play my part today. They'll just have to do it without me." Or,

they could have said, “I’ll just come in when I feel like it. Why should I care about whether the others want me to play?” But they didn’t do that. And it was beautiful.

So, I want us all – no, we all need us all -- to be a part of God’s work here in our church body. As Paul said in **v. 5**: *...in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others...*

At this point, I think I need to clarify a few things about the use of our spiritual gifts:

1. **God gives many kinds of gifts** – *We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us (12:6).*

The seven gifts Paul mentions in vv. 7-8 are simply representative of the kinds of gifts God gives to a church body. There are others lists of gifts in the New Testament; none of them is exactly the same. So, the Bible’s point is not that you should make a list of all the gifts found in the Bible and then go through some kind of testing to see which of these specific gifts you might have. Instead, God gives to each local church body in each cultural setting, the gifts we need to further his work in one another and in the world.

And, when the Spirit is at work, you may be surprised at how diverse the Spirit’s gifts are. Let me show you something from **Exo 31:1ff**: *The LORD said to Moses, “See, I have chosen Bezalel, son of Uri... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge to...”* To do what? Bezalel was to “*make artistic designs (Ex 31:4)*”, i.e., he would build a place of worship that would truly honor God.

That was exactly what God’s people needed back at that time for their walks with God, a place to worship. God gave a man his Spirit to be an artist and craftsman. My point is that God gives each body of believers the gifts we need to further his work in us and in the world.

In my many years of being in local churches, I’ve seen how God has raised up people like carpenters and builders, those with financial acumen, those who understand matters related to the law, those who can design and utilize sound systems, etc. etc. He gives each church body exactly what he knows we need.

Note this: It’s not that your role in the church will always be the same as your role in your profession. It’s not that your spiritual gift is always the same as your natural giftedness. What I mean is that **the kind of service Bezalel did, done simply in service to the Lord, can be as spiritual as preaching, teaching or singing.** God gives gifts as the world and society change – as he determines that we need them.

2. **Spiritual gifts are gifts – not entitlements** – *In view of God’s mercy..., do not think of yourself more highly than you ought... We have different gifts according to grace (12:1,3,6).*

Again, Rom 12:3-8 flows directly out of **Rom 12:1-2** in which we read, “*In view of God’s mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice...*” The word “bodies” is plural and the word “sacrifice” is singular. This is something all Christians are to do in view of God’s mercy, i.e., we all offer our bodies to God – and together we make one living sacrifice. We do this by living a life of service to God and to one another using the gifts we have been given by God. We haven’t earned them. God has given them.

So, when it comes to things like our careers or our academic work, we are entitled to get what we earn. I think that is just and right. The story this week of Golden Globe winner, Michelle Williams, making less than 1% of what her male co-star made in the re-shoot of the ironically named “All the Money in the World” – well, that is simply unjust.

But, today we are talking about gifts given to those who have received mercy. **When our lives are re-set out of gratitude for God’s mercy, then we will thankfully and joyfully use whatever gifts he gives for the building up of the body of Christ!** We should never say, “Well, I think I have the gift of singing solos each week so, if I can’t do it, I’m leaving this body.” No, “in view of God’s mercy, be ready to serve you as God directs and enables you. Do so humbly and gratefully.

3. **Then, make it do what it do** – “*...if it is showing mercy, show mercy cheerfully.*”

If you are a follower of Jesus, I tell you that God has given you his Spirit – and God’s Spirit has given you gifts that he intends for you to use to build up this local church. In your walk with God, you cannot grow without life in the body. Like a limb cut off from the body, you die without functioning in your God-gifted place in the church. So... do you seem to be making no progress in your battle with temptation? Do you

struggle with discouragement? Do you lack experience of the reality of God? Well, one thing you may need is the strength that comes from service in your church body. You need us!

And we need you! Our children need you. Our young people need you. I need you.

Your Sr. Pastor's Recommendation

How do you know how God has gifted you? It starts by being so grateful to God that you are willing to serve anywhere in his church body. Then, find out where the greatest apparent needs are in the church – and begin to serve there. You and those who serve with you will begin to recognize whether he has gifted you to serve in that way.

Right now, it may be that the biggest place that anyone could make a difference here at LAC is in the discipleship of our children and students. There is no place in the work of God that has more potential for lasting impact than serving in the disciplining of younger people. Right now, this local church body has great need and opportunity in this specific area. In fact, we will have people from the Family Ministries Division in the lobby today who will be ready simply to talk with you about this. We are ready to train you – and even work within your schedule. I urge you to go and talk with them. Take that step and see what God will do. “Make your gift do what it do!”

#2: Let It Do What It Do -- ...if God has given people gifts, let them... let them... let them. (12:6b-8)

Verses 6-8 are written in an interesting way. On one side, the verses clearly say that you should use your gifts. But, the way the Apostle Paul wrote this indicates that each church body should let all church members use the gifts God has given them.

As I read Paul's letter to the Romans, I imagine that there was a problem for some of the Jewish believers in Rome to really accept that the Gentile believers should be allowed to do things like “prophesying” (12:6, a word that means to deliver a message from God) or leading (12:7). I can understand the way the Jewish believers might have been thinking. After all, the Gentile believers had not had the long heritage in the Scriptures that Paul's Jewish relatives had been blessed with. Why should they preach and lead?

However, the New Testament is clear that, with the coming of God's Spirit to dwell in all believers, that God will give such callings and gifts to whom he will. As the Bible says in **1 Cor 12:18**: “*God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*” I am convicted about the fact that I as your Sr. Pastor in my calling must give care to facilitating the use of the gifts God gives us here at LAC.

One text that has been particularly convicting to me is **Acts 2:17-18**, the passage that reports what happened when God first gave his Spirit to the church at Pentecost. The Apostle Peter, quoting the prophecy of Joel 2, declared, “*In these last days,*” *God says, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy... Even on the servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”*

Here at LAC, you have vested the authority to determine who will deliver the Word of God to us. I have become more and more convinced, based on passages like Acts 2, that God gives whatever gifts he chooses to whomever he will and that I am told, “Let them use their gifts.” It's also clear in Acts 2:18 that the Word of God is to be delivered by both men and women. I plan to obey the Scriptures' call to let both men and women use their gifts within this church bodies in all venues.

But, be sure of this: Because I am committed to the fact that our practice in matters like these also must be directed by passages like 1 Tim 2:9-15, in which Paul told Pastor Timothy what he was permitting and not permitting in his churches with regard to how men and women serve. In the next few weeks, I plan to put some of our considerations on our website for you to work through as well. I'll let you know when it's up.

And let me say this too. Sometimes, we facilitate the use of the Spirit's through words of counsel and encouragement. When I was in high school and wanted to study law, several church members came to me and told me they recognized that God had given me pastoral gifts. The people there knew me well. They had watched me for years as I served in church. And, God used them to direct me in the use of the gifts they perceived God had given me. Their words still rang in my ears as I left the university presidency to return to the pastorate.

Here's how I see this happening in a church body. Each one of us should take the initiative to find a place where we can begin serving in keeping with the needs of the body. Then, we need to talk with and listen to one another. We have to encourage people when we see God using them. And, sometimes, we might say, "I see a different area in which I think God might use you" – as my church did for me. Paul says again and again, "If God has given particular gifts, let them, let them..." So, you need to get involved in some way so others can see how God works through you. And we all have to have the love and courage to tell others in our church body what we see and experience when God works through them.

And, sometimes, we will need to say, "This area of service is not the best for you." This was applied to me in the first church I served. Chris and I were living in a church-owned home and I had tried to fix the plumbing. The chair of the trustees came to my house and had to spend hours undoing what I had done. As he left he said, "Pastor Greg, let me apply your sermon today. You preach the sermons. I'll do the plumbing."

You see, **God does his work in the church by making us different – and giving us different gifts, each of which is essential to the life of the body.** What a brilliant idea! He's made us so we need one another. So, use your gift to serve: "Make it do what it do." Facilitate and encourage the gifts of others in the body: "Let it do what it do."

In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us (12:5-6). Use your gift – to God's glory alone.