

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, August 27th. I am basing it on Paul's letter to the Romans 12:1-8. "Everybody has something to offer".

It has been busy in our household this past week. Returning from vacation, catching up on laundry, getting ready for school and all the anxiety that goes with that... especially with changes in the Neenah school district. And trying to fit everything in with our family before summer comes to a close. I am also experiencing grief as we have to say goodbye to our adult kids as they head back to college.

Our dog, Badger, is going to miss all the action and attention in our household as well. Our kids discovered if you start dancing, Badger will get up on his hind legs (he is part poodle) and want to dance with you... while playfully barking. I haven't heard our kids belly laugh like that in a while. Badger doesn't want to be left out of all the fun. It is sad, however, if you dance and Badger doesn't want to dance with you.

Badger reminds me of a story that goes along with our second reading for today from Romans 12 about spiritual gifts. It is the story of the little dog on a farm.

One day the new little puppy ran into the horse on the farm. The horse said, "You must be new here." "You will soon find out that the farmer loves me more than all the other animals on the farm, because I carry large loads for him. An animal of your size isn't of much value to him.

The little dog hung his head and ran into a cow. "I have the most honored position on the farm because the farmer can make butter and cheese from my milk. You of course provide no value to the family.

Then the sheep chimed in. "Cow, your position is not greater than mine." I provide wool for clothes and warmth for the entire family." You are correct about the dog, though.

One by one the animals joined in the conversation arguing about their honored positions on the farm. The puppy, stung by criticism ran off on his own to hide... but met an old dog. The old dog said, “it is foolish for you to cry about what you can’t do. You are small, that is true, but you must use the ability the Creator gave you to bring laughter and cheer to the family.”

That night, the farmer came home, exhausted by a hot day in the sun. The little puppy ran up to the farmer, licked his feet, and jumped into his arms. Falling to the ground, the farmer and the puppy romped on the grass for a while. Holding him close and patting him on the head, the farmer said, “No matter how tired I am when I get home, I feel better when you greet me. I wouldn’t trade you for all the animals on the farm.”

This story reminds us that we all are gifted differently by our creator. We are called to serve and give glory to God with our minds and bodies... literally to pour ourselves out as a living sacrifice and not to compare ourselves to others.

In our Romans 12 lesson, the apostle Paul, reminds the Christian community in Rome that they are a community formed by God’s grace, and that we are to live differently in the world than others. To not be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

To be conformed means to form or mold after something. Paul is saying, “Do not let yourselves be molded by the ways of the world.” But by the teachings of Christ. This is hard because much of our thoughts and worries are dominated by worldly things.

Also, the Christian community is meant to be diverse according to Paul. And we are to have attitudes that promote unity rather than discord. We aren’t to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. This destroys community... like the animals in the story who thought they were better than the puppy. We also aren’t to discount our gifts or think someone else is better than me, so I won’t serve.

The message here is not that some Christians have spiritual gifts and some do not. The difference consists in the fact that we have not all received the same gift. Not every Christian will have the gift of preaching, or teaching, or social action, or generosity, or music, or caring for the church's property for example. But every Christian does have some gift to share, and part of one's Christian responsibility is to discover what your gift or gifts are and then use them to the glory of God and for the good of God's creation.

There is no such thing as a negligible gift of the Spirit. The Greek root word for "gift" is "charism". The Greek word for "grace" is "charis". Therefore, all of our spiritual gifts are a gift of God's grace. There are no gifts of God the Christian community that aren't useful or needed.

So, if we are given gifts of God to share with the Christian church and the world, and we have... and they are all given by the grace of God... then we should not hide them under a bushel no or let them remain dormant.

So the question is, what are you going to do with the gifts God gave you? How are you going to respond to the world's deepest needs with the grace you have been given? Amen