

# Sermon: Let the Laity “Move Up”

Text: **I Peter 2:4-5, 9-10 ESV**

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**Introduction:** During the reign of Oliver Cromwell in Britain, they were running very low on silver for their coins, so they began to look for where they could find some more of this precious metal. Interestingly enough, the men came back and reported to him, and shared with him that the place where they had found the most silver in England -- was in the cathedrals. And really it was not so much in the cathedrals, but in the statues of the saints. And Cromwell said, “well let’s melt down the saints and put them into circulation”.

That’s what lay ministry is all about. It is using people, people like you and me. It’s finding what people’s gifts are and getting them involved in ministry, putting them into circulation in the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Discuss Needs, COVID delay)

You see, ministry is a special word within the church. It comes from the Greek word “diakonos” (one who serves.) It is not restricted by age or gender. It is not a special office, like ordained clergy. It isn’t about being a professional, but it *is* about having a special function.

Here is a brief definition of what ministry is. “Ministry is an act of loving service given in Jesus’ name.” In the past the tendency has been to make “ministry” very high, mystical, almost unattainable, but ministry is simply doing anything for the glory of God. It is doing anything that helps promote Jesus and His Kingdom.

This morning we want to talk about the laity (YOU) moving up and why it is so important that every Christian should use his gifts for ministry. There are 10 reasons “why every Christian should use his/her gift for ministry.” The New Testament lifts laity to a higher level of living and service. In our text this morning we see that there is a:

## 1. Lifting of expectations to use gifts for ministry.

**I Peter 2:4-5, 9-10 ESV** <sup>4</sup> As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

**Verse 5** is about the community of believers (*stones* being put together). C.E.B. Cranfield writes: “the free-lance Christian, who would be a Christian but is too superior to belong to the visible Church upon the earth in one of its forms, is simply a contradiction in terms.”

**The text continues at verse 9:**

**9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter uses six terms to describe the followers of Jesus. You can underline these.

1. living stones
2. holy priesthood
3. chosen race (people)
4. a royal priesthood
5. holy nation
6. a people God possesses

*living stones* - means that we are a part of a continual project that God is developing, alive and growing, being shaped and placed in God's new building not made by human hands. Jesus is the chief cornerstone - the foundation on which we are being built in a never-ending construction.

*holy priesthood* - Now what is a priest? It is someone who offers something to God. In the Old Testament it was animals and agricultural gifts that were offered, but in the New Testament we follow Jesus' example and we are what's offered. We become the consecrated and dedicated offering. **Romans 12:1 ESV** **1** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

*chosen race (people)* - How wonderful it is when we realize that God has chosen us. Even though we do not deserve it, God chooses us. God chose us while we were still sinners, unlovely, and unfit for service.

**Illus.** Being chosen to play on a team, or to be in a play, or for ministry all carry quite a thrill. But I can tell you a greater thrill. A greater thrill is when we realize God has chosen us (adopted us) - included us in His family.

*royal priesthood* - speaks to the idea we have direct access to God. Before in the O.T. only the high priest had real access to God. He was the only one who could go into the Holy of Holies, but now because of Jesus we have access to God anytime and any place we want.

You don't have to have the minister or elders go to God for you. You can go into His presence for yourself. Now, corporate prayer is fine and needs to be practiced. And we do need to pray for each other, but isn't it wonderful that we can go in private to the Lord of the universe and He is interested in hearing what we have to say.

*holy nation* - our spiritual citizenship transcends all boundaries and distinctions.

Mention Mexico trip.

finally, *a people God possesses (belonging to God)* - This is all about stewardship.

We sometimes will talk about how God is the owner of everything.  
Everything we produce belongs to God.

These six phrases raise all believers to the position of ministers. They put all Christians in the same place once occupied by the Old Testament priests.

Let's talk a little about Church history. Martin Luther helped the Church see the light in three areas:

1. Scripture is the sole authority (available to everyone)
2. We are saved by faith alone (free gift, not by works...)
3. There is a priesthood of all believers.

And this is the point that has been clouded and has not come clearly down through the centuries. Oh, there has been lip service to the concept, but not near enough practice of this biblical idea.

As long as there is a division and a distinction between clergy and laity,

**2. Spiritual growth will never be fully realized until we use our gifts.**

in other words, We grow spiritually through ...

1. Our time spent with God – prayer and in the Word.
2. Our time spent with other Christians - fellowship and study.
3. Our time spent using our spiritual gifts – in ministry.

You see we are to be instruments for God, not ornaments. It is fine to look good, but it better to be good and do good.

**Romans 12:4-9 ESV** 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads,[gives aid] with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

The third reason you need to move up as laity is:

### **3. Success is only possible if every member has a ministry.**

Jesus realized this. He even told his disciples this. It wasn't a question of enough work, but enough laborers. The fields he said were white unto harvest, but the laborers were few. We need each others' gifts being used.

Do you realize how many people besides staff people it takes to make Sunday what it is here at Weston Church of Christ? We could never even have Sunday programs here at the church without a lot of you helping-doing ministry.

What kind of church would we be if everyone was using his/her gift?

### **4. Needs will never be met without the lay member.**

The fact is if the laity of this church do not minister, many things will go undone.

There was a similar problem in the early church (**Acts 6**, Word of God and prayer were being neglected; widows, too). I can't do it all. The elders cannot meet every need. That's why you are so very important.

**Barefoot doctors in China.** There was a problem years ago in China. The doctors could not take care of everyone who had medical needs so they instituted a program called "barefoot doctors." They found out that 90% of the people just needed help with some very basic needs and the other 10% could get medical attention at a qualified hospital. So they trained these barefoot doctors to take care of the needs of the people.

This principle worked for physical needs in China and it also works for spiritual and physical needs in the church.

## **5. God is limited without laity (ministry) commitment.**

This is a bit of a theological issue. God is limited in ministry by our lack of involvement. It's not that He can't do it without us, but that is how He chooses to work.

**Illus.** During the second World War, there was a small French community, who had in the center of their town a statue of Jesus. It was the focal point for the town. And when the bombing came some of the shrapnel hit the statue and broke it into several pieces. They gathered up what they could and stored the pieces in crates until after the war. And after the war with great hearts of love and affection, the people began to rebuild that statue of Jesus. They were so excited. Because of the damage it wasn't near as beautiful as before, but in some ways it was even more beautiful.

But much to their dismay when they had reassembled all the pieces they could not find Jesus' hands. And that was tough to take because the hands were very significant. They had shown the nail prints (the marks of crucifixion). They thought they might even take the statue down until one day a person put a bronze plaque underneath the statue of Jesus which read "He has no hands but ours."

And all of a sudden that community began to understand something. This is the same thing I wish we could get. Jesus needs ALL of us to help Him show God to a world who is lost.

## **6. Church is incomplete without everyone using his/her gifts.**

The church will never be a whole body until everyone is using his/her gifts. Paul talks about that in **I Corinthians 12**. Each part needs the other.

There are three possible problems with gifts in the church

1. **ABUSE** – Too few people using too many gifts (worn out, tired, overloaded).  
Mount Pleasant Christian Church - not your ministry, but ours
2. **DISUSE** – Too many people using too few gifts, or none of their gifts
3. **MISUSE** – People using the wrong gifts.

It is the job of our leadership to help you find your gift. We must equip you because God has commanded it! But all we can do is encourage you to obey God then it's up to you.

## **7. Every Christian has a gift and is expected to use it.**

A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ *according to God's will and grace* for use within the Body.

**The Animal's School.** Once upon a time, the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of the New World. So they organized a school. They adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming, in fact better than his instructors, but he only made passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Because the duck was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school, so nobody worried about that except the duck.

So the rabbit started at the top of her class in running, but had a nervous breakdown because of so much makeup work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He also developed a "charlie horse" from overexertion and then got a "C" in climbing and a "D" in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was severely disciplined. In the climbing class he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on doing it his own way to get there.

This story painfully portrays what too often happens in the church. Many are not using their most *natural* gifts. Some are trying to do things where they really don't have a gift. If God made you a duck, you're a duck. You need to swim. And whatever you do, don't get bent out of shape if you waddle when you run.

## **8. Using your gifts glorifies God.**

**I Peter 4:10-11 ESV** <sup>10</sup> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup> whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

## **9. Not using your gifts displeases God.**

You remember the Parable of the Talents (**Matthew 25:14-30**). The one who did not use his talent greatly displeased God. Let's see what God's guidelines are concerning gifts in that parable:

1. God gives different gifts to different people (also amounts).
2. God expects us to use our gifts. There will be an accounting.
3. If we use our gifts, we will be rewarded.
4. If we do not use our gifts, we will be disciplined.
5. No gift no matter how small should go unused.

**Illus.** How would we feel if on Christmas morning our children never opened or used their gifts? How would we feel if they took their unopened gifts up to their room and threw them into the closet? How would we feel if when asked what they got for Christmas, our children responded: "We didn't get any gifts?"

A part of giving gifts is to see the response. Can you imagine the feelings a parent would have with such ungrateful children?

The reason the laity needs to move up is that...

## **10. Using your gift for ministry, ministers to God.**

You remember the **Matthew 25**: passage where it reads: 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

**Conclusion:** An ethics professor divided a group of fifteen students into three groups of five each. They were given envelopes. The first group of five was given an envelope telling them to proceed immediately across campus to Stewart Hall, that they had fifteen minutes to get there and if they didn't arrive on time it would affect their grade. This was called the 'High Hurry' group. A minute or two later he handed out envelopes to five others. Their instructions again were to go over to Stewart Hall but they were given 45 minutes. And after they departed he turned over the envelopes with instructions to the third group, the 'Low Hurry' group. They were given three hours to arrive at Stewart Hall.

**Now, not known to any of these students, the teacher had arranged with three students from the Princeton University Drama Department to meet them along the way, acting as people in great need. In front of Alexander Hall one of the drama students was going around covering his head with his hands and moaning out loud, in great pain. As they passed by Miller Chapel on their way to Stewart Hall they'd find another fellow who was on the steps laying face down as if unconscious. And finally on the very steps of Stewart Hall the third drama student was acting out an epileptic seizure. It's interesting that, of the first group, no one stopped, of the second, two of the five stopped, and of the third fivesome all five stopped. The point was that maybe one of the reasons that the Good Samaritan was able to stop and help was because he had a more leisurely agenda, while the religious 'Pros' of Jesus' day were living in the fast lane and simply had no time for interruptions. Their calendars may well have been filled with commitments that left them no leeway.**

**It is time that churches stop just surviving and start actively doing ministry in Jesus' name and thriving! We need everyone on board with this biblical idea and give the mission of the Church our highest priority! Amen**

**TRUST IN GOD**

**HE WILL SEE YOU THROUGH;**

**GLORIFY HIS NAME in 2022!**