

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, over the entire universe, this is your house. We come to sanctify it in all the ways in which we seek to follow you. We come to be the church, in all the ways in which we have to share ourselves, contribute our ideas, and be the blessed people that you lovingly created. We come to lift you up, and we come to sharpen ourselves into disciples that can more fully live out your principles and to be your hands and feet to a world that needs to see your followers at work. Hear our prayers in our hearts and in our words, God.

We come to worship you, Gracious One, but worship is not enough. We ask you to guide our feet, but we also recognize that we have to move our feet before you can guide them. We wish to be disciples, but we recognize the first order of being a disciple is to follow. In this time of renewed contemplation, help us to renew our promises toward discipleship. Help us to take a good look at who we are and where we are most energetic to see how we might be of the best service. You made us in so many unique ways that we each have something to contribute that is not necessarily what our neighbor has to contribute. For this, we praise you and ask for renewed perspective that puts this all into place. We pray these things in the name of the Lord of Grace, Jesus, who taught us to pray...

## SERMON

Sometimes I get really down on myself. I am not really a directive leader with a strong outgoing personality. I am not a preacher like Billy Graham that can draw in hundreds of people. Sometimes I really stink at remembering details. And, you know what? I don't have the natural athleticism and arm strength of Peyton Manning. And that, overall, makes me a failure. If I can't be like all these people who are the absolute example of what I want to be, then I obviously don't measure up, right?

Sometimes I feel that way, but is it right? We have to encounter these sorts of questions during Lent. Lent calls us to look seriously at our lives and our means of discipleship. Discipleship means to follow, quite literally, and we have to look at how we follow. Indeed, discipleship cannot be a list of how clearly deficient we are as Christians and how we are dirt in God's sight. I don't feel that's faithful to Christ or the Gospel that we preach. On other hand, discipleship cannot validate everything we do as perfect; we need not change everything. There is a healthy, faithful middle ground between those two extremes. One piece of that is recognizing, truly recognizing, what you bring to the table and that what you bring to the table for this church, for this community, for the Body of Christ is valuable, but we can always use those skills to grow into more. It doesn't matter where we are in life, for each period of life provides its opportunities and its challenges. Let us take time to delve into this topic of gifts as I tell you more about my recent trip to Colorado Springs, what I learned, and how this information fits into our scripture lesson.

Two weeks ago, I spent time with colleagues to learn some new insights in Colorado Springs. It was a time called RIM: Residence in Ministry, a time for us provisional members to further discern how to be pastors and leaders. The focus of this spring's RIM was a personality test called the DiSC. I don't know if anyone has heard of this particular assessment. It was a test that helps you recognize facets of your personality, what you do well, how you naturally relate to the world, and what those things mean. I found the results worked well. Not only did it confirm things that I knew about myself, it also gave me new affirmation of myself and the skills that God gave me. The overall structure is of the DiSC is simple, and I'll try to explain it the best I can. Imagine a circle, split into four. Each wedge of the circle has a letter within it, and each part of the circle works as a

spectrum, from strongest on the outside to less prevalent at the center of the circle. We all have a letter that demonstrates certain characteristics on one section of the circle, whether that be D, i, S, or C. D's are more directive, blunt leaders, i's are more social and outgoing, S's are often focused on relationships and making sure that everyone feels cared for, and C's are very calculated, logical people. You can have a primary letter and can have an optional secondary letter, depending on where you are on your particular spectrum. I myself am a strong SC, which means that I show strong characteristics of an S with secondary characteristics that move toward C. My personality is naturally collaborative, wanting to make sure that everyone feels cared for and welcomed, and I don't make decisions without collaborating with other people. Also, as a C, I tend to appreciate logic and a thought-through approach to everything; I also seek to do my best in everything and tend to get annoyed when I sense that others aren't giving their best effort or trying to work with each other. I don't always make quick decisions, but I like to make sure that my decisions are thoughtful. All of these things are perfect for who I am, and they allow me to work into the Body of Christ in my own unique way.

It's easy to value some personality characteristics over another, but that's not necessarily God's way. What this exercise further affirms to me is that we all have a place. We all have parts of us that naturally come out, that show who we are in God's grand and great plan. In fact, my personality is coming out right now, and every time I step up to the pulpit. My personality comes out in how I craft a sermon. I naturally demonstrate a logical approach to the bible while also seeking to bring people together. I see these as important parts of my personality as well as the story of the Gospel. Naturally, the way I think about things and express things may not be how you do the same. You might be sitting in your

pew right now thinking about something else, like what dinner is going to be or what your to-do list is after church because this sitting and listening stuff just isn't for you. Maybe you're sitting there thinking that I'm talking too much about thinking. Perhaps you might be sitting there, saying, "well, give me more examples!" because you need that concrete connection to what I'm trying to express. Maybe you'd rather be connecting with your neighbors instead of sitting in worship. All of these thoughts are valid, and they show how you might naturally connect with God's calling. Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians:

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses."

Paul says you are good at something, in this time, in this place, despite what you might think because of the Spirit's work. If you are bored by how I deliver my sermons, that's fine, but at the same time, I want to know how I can connect further with you and how you listen. Some of you like action, and some of you like a thoughtful, slower pace. All are OK. Throughout every age and ability, it's important to remember that who you are and how you do things is different than others, and you can contribute your unique perspective and skill to everyone's betterment. When we recognize and live into this fact, we live into faithfulness because we live in tune with who God wants us to be and how the Spirit has allotted to us gifts that we utilize in different ways to bring glory to God. It's rather neat.

On the other hand, it is a subtle snare to get involved in naming things about who you are not, what skills you don't naturally have, and how this person over here is exactly

who you want to be. I've done this a lot. I don't have the experience of this pastor, I don't have this passion or these skills, I don't have the natural athleticism and arm strength of Peyton Manning. That greatly devalues all you are and all you have to contribute. I know there are people that feel ashamed that they cannot get up to the pulpit and deliver a sermon or even lay read, but you shouldn't. Instead, you have gifts that I do not, Jeff does not, Joan does not, and that is integral. Paul says we devalue the Body of Christ in our scripture when we say, "because I am not this, I am not important." In a way, we tell God that because I am not an extrovert, because I am not a powerful preacher, because I don't have the skills to be a lay reader, because I am not a famous athlete, you screwed up, God, and I'm pretty much useless. Whether that is said or implied, is insulting to you and to God.

We are disciples when we pay heed to who we are and what we do best, when we pay heed to our gifts, for they lead us into where we are in the midst of the Body of Christ and how we can best fulfill our callings, both big and small. And there is a time for both the big and the little forms of calling. We tend to see God's calling as something great, something hard to see, something beyond our comprehension, something we will never know, and something that lasts a lifetime. To an extent, that may be right, but I don't think that God wants us in the dark at all times or stuck at the big level. What's really the point of that? Calling happens at all times, from big things to small things. We might need to look at the absolute obvious, the completely clear to get a glimpse into what we can do for the Body of Christ. Just because you do not speak eloquently does not mean that you do not have a valuable voice. Just because I don't have the preaching skills of my mentors or Billy Graham doesn't mean that I cannot grow and develop what I do have into the best I can be.

Just because you have a raw gift doesn't mean you can't grow it in time to be something greater. Gifts grow with time, intention, and attention at all points during our lives.

We can see this at work among ourselves. Many of us are in positions around the church that appeal to who we are and what we do well. I appreciate, whenever we work on a new event or project, I have people like Connie, Penny, and Catherine who naturally think about all the details that many of us miss. I appreciate our head greeter Wayne who just naturally exudes joy all the time. Penny has ways of working with numbers and playing with those skills in a way that absolutely drains me. I'm barely scratching the surface, for there are so many, many more. Each of us contributes to this congregation in unique ways, and we must acknowledge these gifts, especially when they don't get much press.

You all know by now that this chapter is probably my favorite in the whole Bible. I love to preach on it from several different viewpoints, and this is another one. It makes it clear that nobody, nobody should be left out of the greater picture. We have no right to tell someone that they cannot work within the church who in good faith wants to contribute. Everyone has a place in the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ, in all of its forms, has a task. This is especially an appropriate message for where we are now. In our visioning meeting next Wednesday, these topics are going to come to the fore as we seek to wrap up the crafting of our new Mission Statement and to put it into action. There are things we can do as the Body of Christ that other churches cannot do, and, on the other hand, there are many things that other churches can do that we cannot. That's not shameful; it just is. We can't be all things to all people, but we also can't talk about our gifts to the exclusion of others. God calls us in this place and in this time, to be disciples with our specialty Spiritual toolboxes, and this deserves a closer look time and again for our ministry's benefit.

The bottom line, when we come into these walls to refine our discipleship, is that I don't want to hear you say what you can't do, what you can no longer do, where you feel you are falling short of what you want to be. Those aren't always productive conversations, but, instead, let's have a discussion about what you do well, what makes you joyful, what makes being a follower of Christ give you life. Even if you're 90+ years old, God is using you for a purpose, even if you don't have the energy and abilities that you once had, because we all have a place in the life of discipleship and the Body of Christ at every age. I invite you to ask yourself these kinds of questions in a way you can answer. What do I do well? Where do I find results? Where do I find energy when I'm doing things? Where are my passions? What do I want to be doing? How do we all fit together? Whether the answers lead you to something big or small, all are worth encountering time and again; you never really answer the questions once and for all, for we continually change. When we really plug into who we are, who we were created to be, where we get energy, what drains us, then we start to figure out where God is lovingly calling. Thanks be to God, for we are lovingly and fearfully made. Amen and Amen.