

**“Whatever”**  
**Reverend Bill Gause**  
**Overbrook Presbyterian Church**  
**30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**October 25, 2020**

**Scripture Reading: 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:10**

<sup>10</sup>Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.



**Sermon: “Whatever”**

I love getting gifts. I think probably most people do. And sometimes the gift you get is perfect. You know exactly what you’ll use it for or where it will go in your collection. The bag you’ve been asking for. The book you’ve been wanting to read. The kitchen utensil you can’t wait to use.

But that’s not always the case. Ever get a gift that left you wondering “What do I do with this?” We have a three-foot-tall wooden Christmas card reindeer at our house. It’s exactly what it sounds like. It’s a reindeer carved out of wood with big antlers designed to hold Christmas cards for display during the holidays. The people who gave it to us are dear friends. But we never use it. It actually holds dust in our garage right now. And when we got married, someone gave us a stained-glass chicken lamp. It was a lamp, made out of stained glass, shaped like a chicken. It too, was a kind gift from a lovely person... but we just didn’t know what to do with it. And that’s the way it is with gifts sometimes. The people who give them are wonderful people. And you appreciate the thought. But the gift leaves you wondering “What do I do with this?”

God is a very generous gift giver. Everything we have and everything we are come from God, and that includes some pretty interesting gifts. But I think we sometimes struggle to see those gifts and to understand what exactly we are supposed to do with them.

Now when we think about God given gifts, I think we tend to go to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12 where Paul compares the church to a body. Every part of the body is important. And just because one person’s gift is seen as less important, that doesn’t make it so. But there, Paul is talking about our “churchier” gifts. Some folks sing hymns. Some teach Bible study. Some provide TLC. Like the parts of a body, we all have a role to play in the church. This passage from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter builds on that idea but takes a broader approach. “Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” And that says to me all of our gifts matter, even the ones we don’t typically see as “Churchy” gifts. This isn’t just about what you can do in the church. This is about what you can do. Whatever gifts God has given you, however small and esoteric they may be, can be used in service to God.

Mary and I were down at the Franklin County Board of Elections Tuesday to cast our votes. We were in line behind a gentleman who was wearing a cap indicating he is a military veteran. One of the volunteers, spotted the man’s cap and said, “Thank you for your service.” I think that happens a lot. People respect the sacrifice and service of those who served in our nation’s military. The ability to serve is a tremendous gift that a lot of people recognize and acknowledge. But then, a few minutes later, as we moved further along the line, I saw a woman walk up and drop her absentee ballot into the drop box just outside the front door. And when she did, another woman in line somewhere behind us gave a big shout and started clapping. The woman who had delivered her ballot seemed a little confused that what she had done attracted anyone else’s attention. Her willingness to vote was a gift that some might see as smaller and less praise-worthy, but it was her gift, and she used it. And our nation is made better for it.

And those acts of service got me thinking about all of the people who serve our nation. Not just soldiers, but law enforcement officers and fire fighters and EMTs and postal workers. And the people we may not have seen as important before, but who in this time of pandemic have shown themselves to be invaluable: the store shelf stockers, the cleaning crews, the delivery drivers. And then I got to thinking about the great service that teachers provide our nation, and social workers, and community activists. I remembered the sacrifices made by those who stood on the front lines of the Civil Rights movement and the women’s rights movement and the LGBTQ movement and what they’ve done to help make our country better. And what it all boils down to is people, just regular people, using the gifts God has given them for the purposes to which God has called them. Some get glory and recognition. But most don’t. That doesn’t make their gifts or their contributions any less important. God has given us all gifts. We just don’t recognize them a lot of the time because they don’t match up with what we see as important.

I think we tend to see some gifts as important and then look for those gifts within ourselves. And that’s why we so often think we have nothing to offer. I can’t preach. I can’t teach. I can’t carry a tune. Oh well, I’ve got plenty of nothin.’ But

what we should do is start from the other end of that equation. Ask yourself “What gifts has God given me?” Make a list. Include them all. No matter how esoteric. No matter how random. And then ask yourself, “How can I use those gifts for God’s purposes?”

I think about the person who is an accountant and who has a gift for numbers and for understanding the murkier aspects of the tax code. She uses her gifts to help people who don’t share those gifts to file their taxes. I think about the retired couple who have the gift of time and energy and who use those gifts to help their grandchildren with their homeschooling. I think about the teenager who has a knack for baking and who uses that gift to make cookies for Open Shelter lunches.

What are your gifts? What is it that you do well? I love the author’s use of the word “Whatever.” Whatever gifts you have. Because we all recognize the big gifts and the gifts that are clearly important. But all gifts can be used for God’s purposes. I mean, why do you think God gave you those gifts in the first place??? No matter how small and inconsequential the gift may appear, God can use it. And if you don’t think so, that’s only because you haven’t figured out what to do with it yet.

Can you build or fix things? If not, are you able to learn? Habitat for Humanity<sup>1</sup> is one well-known ministry where you can use your home building and repair skills or your willingness to learn them to the benefit of God’s Kingdom by helping to build housing for the poor. If you can swing a hammer, swing it for God.

How about driving? Can you drive a car? Meals on Wheels<sup>2</sup> always needs folks to deliver meals to their clients. If you can drive, you can drive for God.

Are you an organized person? Most places that accept donations need organized people to help sort and categorize donations. If you’re a born organizer, you can organize for God.

Are you a patient person who loves children? We need Sunday school teachers and helpers and Confirmation partners and nursery workers and youth advisors. Then there are plenty of tutoring programs and mentoring programs around Columbus that need your help. Go be patient and love children for God.

Do you play golf? There’s a program offered through Ohio Health called “Fore Hope”<sup>3</sup> which uses golf as a therapeutic activity to help people living with neurological conditions like Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, or traumatic brain injury. And they need volunteers. If you play golf, go and play Golf for God.

Can you text? The Crisis Text Line<sup>4</sup> is a free, 24 hour text line for people in crisis. According to their website, volunteer “Crisis Counselors answer texts from people in crisis, bringing them from a hot moment to a cool calm through active listening, collaborative problem solving, and safety planning.” If you can text, maybe you’ll consider texting for God.

Can you sit and keep someone company? There are a number of people in our church who reside in nursing homes and people who spend time in the hospital. Many of those people would welcome a visit. In this time of extra safety measures, phone calls might be welcome, too. So, if you can sit and visit, you can sit and visit for God. If you have a knack for phone conversation, you can make phone calls for God!

Whatever you can do, you can do that for God. We have a tendency to undervalue ourselves; to dismiss our own gifts as unimportant. But God has given each of us something, many things that we can do, and God has given us to capability to learn and master so much more. The essence of stewardship is to take account of those gifts and then use them for the Kingdom of God.

Whatever the gifts God has given you, your calling is to use them to serve God by serving God’s people. That is what we need to take away from this season of stewardship. Remember the talents God has given you; no matter how small, no matter how unique, and focus on how you can use those talents for God’s purpose.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.habitat.org/volunteer>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/americaletsdolunch>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohiohealth.com/services/neuroscience/our-programs/forehope/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.crisistextline.org/become-a-volunteer/>