

**Christians: Use Your Talents  
to Serve Your Savior!  
Sermon on 1 Peter 4:7-11  
Saint Mark's, Watertown  
Pastor Karl Walther  
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**Introduction: Why Are We Christians Still Here?**

Jesus once said: *Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.* Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—eager to use your talents for Christ and for others:

One of the perks of being a pastor is visiting shut-ins. Yeah, I know that some pastors don't like visiting shut-ins. My observation suggests that those pastors usually have a little trouble overcoming their own self-importance. But your three pastors – and three of our able helpers – we all enjoy visiting shut-ins. I'm guessing that we each spend maybe the equivalent of an afternoon every week doing so.

Visiting shut-ins is good for a guy. Shut-ins have a wealth of life's experience to share. Their sicknesses and sufferings prepare me for my own. Very many of our shut-ins happily listen to God's word and receive Christ's sacrament. They also ask good questions.

One question I often get from shut-ins is this: "Pastor, what am I still doing here?" That's a good question, isn't it? They're thinking, "Here I am. I'm sick and suffering. I'd like to go and enter into my Savior's presence in heavenly glory. Instead, sometimes I feel like a burden to others, because I have to ask them to do things for me. So, what am I still doing here?"

It is a good question. In fact, it's a good question for all of us. "What am I still doing here?" I mean: the moment we came to trust in Christ – for many of us, way back when we were baptized as infants – we were ready to enter into paradise: with sins washed away, clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. So, "Why are we Christians still here?"

**Theme: Christians, Use Your Talents to Serve Your Savior!**

Well, that's something God's Word to us today addresses. Today we continue a three-week look at stewardship: the use of our time, talents, and treasures for Jesus and for others. And today we're going to consider some of what Jesus says regarding the use of our talents. Essentially, he's going to say to us: 1) GOD'S GOAL IS NEAR, and 2) GOD'S GIFTS ARE OURS, so: \* SERVE YOUR SAVIOR!

**Part One: God's Goal Is Near**

God's Word to us today is First Peter, chapter four, verses seven through eleven. It's a part of the epistle the Apostle Peter wrote from Rome to Christians in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, in the late sixties AD.

Already back then – nearly two thousand years ago! – Peter wrote under inspiration of the Holy Spirit: ***The end of all things is near.*** Literally—literally: *Of all things ... the (final) goal ... has (already) approached.*

Isn't that interesting?! Already nineteen and a half centuries ago, God was warning his people that his final day of judgment had already begun to come. If that was true nearly two millennia ago, think of how true it is right now!

*Of all things ... the (final) goal ... has (already) approached.* Surely it's true that enough sin has accumulated to make God very angry! Surely it's true that God will not tolerate such sin forever! It's certainly true that he could return to judge the world this very day. And then, what about us? I mean: certainly we also have sinned enough to infuriate God. Certainly he won't tolerate our sins forever. Don't you and I deserve to be judged guilty by God?

*Of all things ... the (final) goal ... has (already) approached.* But what's God's goal? God bids you to believe, in this his Word, that he wants you with him in heavenly glory. Already he has drawn near to us to accomplish our salvation—that's why Jesus walked this planet for a third of a century, centuries ago. Already God has drawn near to us to forgive our sins—so near that his blood has fallen on us, covered us, and pardoned us. Already Jesus has risen to scrub us clean, to feed our souls, and to speak to us—as he's doing at this very moment.

*Of all things ... the (final) goal ... has (already) approached.* Nevertheless, that begs the question: What are we still doing here?

## **Part Two: God's Gifts Are Ours**

Well, maybe the best way to put it is this: When Jesus drew near to us, he didn't only come to free us away from our sins and from God's judgment. He also redeemed us for something: for righteousness, for a whole life of service to him. Wasn't Martin Luther on to something? ...when he taught us in his Small Catechism, "All this Jesus did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally."

Or as Peter puts it, under inspiration by the Holy Spirit: **Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.** Maybe more picturesquely: He wants us to be *faithful managers of the multifaceted grace of God.*

See: God didn't just convert us to Christ and then – poof! – transport us immediately to heavenly glory. No! His purpose is that, for as long as he gives us, we demonstrate his grace to us by using our gifts to serve others on this earth. And I'll tell you what: That makes for a life not just obedient to Jesus, but also a life really satisfying to the person who is living it!

I mean: whatever your walk in life – whether senior citizen or worker or parent or spouse or student: whatever! – whatever your walk in life, you are demonstrating God's grace in Christ to you and to the world. You are a *Christian* senior citizen, a *Christian* worker, a *Christian* family member, a *Christian* student. And that makes all the difference in the world!

## **Theme: So, Serve Your Savior**

In other words: "What are we Christians still doing here?" Well, God's goal is near; God's gifts are ours; so, we need to serve our Savior! And the rest of God's Word to us today gives some specifics toward doing that. The specifics come in four pairs of commands.

First of all, God the Holy Spirit directs us: **Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.** Divine directive number one? Be *sensible* and *sober*—and *pray*!

See: God is telling us that although a sense of humor is a gift from him, finally there are things more important than a laugh. Be *sensible*! God is telling us that although a sip of an adult beverage here and there is a gift from him, drunkenness is damnable. Be *sober*! And that's so that we can keep our heads on straight to pray. And really, we ought to be praying almost always—a continuous line of communication to God.

Okay, divine directive number two: **Above all, love each other deeply** – continually! – **because love covers over a multitude of sins.**

Wow, did it ever, eh?! I mean: God's love – God's sacrificial compassion in his Son Jesus Christ – it did cover over a multitude – an enormous mountain! – of my sins. So, can't I get over the wrongs others have perpetrated on me—for Christ's sake? Can't I forgive and keep on forgetting what my brother did, what my sister did, what my neighbor did? In fact, must I not forgive myself—for the sake of Jesus?

Christ graced us with his pardon, and he enables us to demonstrate his grace. Therefore, divine directive number three: **Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.** Be *hospitable* and *sincere*.

The word *hospitable* here is fascinating. It says literally – syllable by syllable – be a *friend of foreigners*. See: very often our selfishness leads us to view others as a threat—as if God can't bless us sufficiently with them using up our resources. No, Christ Jesus says: “Be *hospitable* – a friend to others – and do it *sincerely*, without *grumbling* about it afterwards.” After all, weren't you a foreigner to Jesus Christ? And hasn't he brought you near him?

Finally: divine directive number four out of four: **If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides.** *Speak*, as though God's Spirit were speaking through you. *Serve*, as though God's Spirit were serving through you.

Wow! Will that ever make a difference in our lives! From now on, when we speak for the Spirit: not only will that completely take away my sarcasm and your curse words, it will also have us patiently persuading one another better to serve Jesus. From now on, when we serve as slaves to the Spirit: not only will that entirely wipe out all our selfishness, it will have us really making an impact on the lives of others. You and I will be the one place people will witness Christ's love put into practice.

And God grant that it becomes the opportunity for them to learn more about Jesus!

## **Conclusion: We Christians Are Still Here to Serve Our Savior!**

Well, I began the sermon with a question on the part of some of our shut-ins, “Pastor, why am I still here?” I should tell you how it is that I answer those shut-ins.... I usually try to say, “Well, I'm glad you're here—for me to visit. And you're here because the Bible says your times are in Christ's hands—and his hands, once pierced for you: they never make a mistake. ... Besides, the dear Lord is probably using you in two ways I can think of. First: you're a living example for everyone. You're a Christian, trusting Jesus, until Jesus takes you home with him. And secondly: you're here because you take time to pray a lot. Lots of younger people think they're too busy to pray. You know better. So, keep on praying—and keep on praying for us, so that a lot of other people get to hear the good news of Jesus and join you in heaven.”

I'm thinking that those are pretty good directives for all of us: **so that** – as Peter put it – **in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.**

Jesus once said: *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Amen.