

Date: February 6, 2022

Series: Vision 2022 – *Building Up the Body of Christ*

Title: *Building Up the Body of Christ: Through Ministry*

Text: Romans 12

Preacher: Peggy Peek

Let's pray

Lord God—May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Thank you for the privilege of looking into your word these past weeks and sending your Holy Spirit to guide my meditations and my encounters with scripture and the powerful testimony of your people engaged on your mission and ministry. May this time we have together be one of insight and inspiration from your son Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen

So the song Kenn just blessed us with was one he shared a week ago during the Upward devotions at half-time—One of the many ways we can serve and do ministry here at Redland. Here is one of our great Upward Volunteers, Jay. He coordinates our concession stand and has kept many of us fed these past four Upward Saturdays. He helps us practice hospitality to the families that attend upwards. He uses his spiritual gifts of giving and serving in a hospitality ministry to strengthen the body of Christ by filling a tangible need that he was asked to help with Upwards and Youth. He enjoys working with great people who are very dedicated volunteers. He has learned the value of teamwork in the body of Christ.

The song Kenn sang was popular a few years ago by MercyMe called *In the Blink of an Eye*. I listened to it during a couple of half times last week and realized it lined up with the message for today. I asked Kenn to sing it and then asked him where he had gotten it from. He told me it was a MercyMe song. Back in 2000, before MercyMe was famous, they were a band who was self-producing albums and performing in churches, very often in their home state of Texas. My friends, Tamra and Jason in Dallas, invited me to a recording concert for this new group on a Saturday night before Christmas while I was in Texas visiting family.

It was a small concert venue in Deep Ellum, a neighborhood in Dallas. They had taken out all the chairs so they could get as many people in to record the live music session and video for *I Can Only Imagine*. It was really cool, but the only song we heard that night was *I Can Only Imagine* and we heard it about a dozen times. I tried to find the video to show y'all but I googled and it wasn't easily accessible. MercyMe is going to be in concert in March in Fairfax and the tickets are no longer only \$5 (and I have secured tickets.) Bart Millard and the other songwriters in MercyMe have a way of describing the Christian life. Did you hear Kenn sing "*You put me here for a reason. You have a mission for me. You knew my name and You called it long before I learned to breathe.*"

This is week 4 of our sermon series for our 2022 Vision—Building Up the Body of Christ Through Ministry/Service. Let's do a quick review:

Mark started us off with our Vision Series on Building up the Body of Christ—We wanted to focus on all five of our purposes as a faith community and Mark started with Discipleship which in some ways encompasses all of the purposes. We make disciples through times of Fellowship and by worshipping a Holy God in Community. Without Worship, our spiritual and physical reservoirs are soon empty for the Service and Ministry we are called to do and our Discipleship without Evangelism is self-serving not God Serving.

In Week 1, Mark shared about Jesus Calling His First Disciples: how Jesus challenged them to deny themselves and follow Him, in order to fulfill God's good purpose. Remember Mark shared that It's a PROCESS that requires PROGRESS. But when making progress in the process you will be OPPRESSED. He also shared that Discipleship should be OTHERS-centered. And we learned that we grow as disciples when we Spend time with other DISCIPLES and Spend time with JESUS.

Here is one of our Preschool Sunday School teachers Lisa. We are going to be seeing a number of our volunteers this morning and I asked them all a series of questions. What are one or two of your spiritual gifts? Why did you decide to

serve in your ministry area? What do you enjoy most about ministry? What have you learned from volunteering? Lisa answered, *"I'd say Teaching for sure and I'd like to say Faith as well. Definitely teaching though, I see that at work as well. Early after we joined Redland, Matt and I started volunteering in the extended care time. My parents taught high school and then preschool Sunday School forever, and as a teen I often helped my parents in their preschool class.*

"Volunteering in extended care seemed like a good way to get involved and serve at Redland. Jennifer Crocker was the Children's Minister then and, after we had been doing extended care for about a year, she asked if I would be interested in helping teach Sunday School. Something felt very right about that, clearly the Holy Spirit confirming that for me. It started as a way to serve, get involved, and get to know people that felt comfortable to me and I guess I followed where God has led since then. There is nothing better than getting to tell people about Jesus. And preschoolers have the most incredible faith, they never doubt or shrink God down.

"I love getting to see the kids I have taught be baptized. I am so thankful that I get to be a tiny part of that journey, that I got to help teach them a little bit about how much God loves them. It comes back to me 1000 times over. They make me laugh and surprise me, often all at the same time. The faith of the kids that I have taught is so infectious, it teaches me every week. There is reason for the statement "the faith of a child" - it is truly inspiring. I have also been learning patience and compassion from them - we all have our off days, including me, and I have learned to stick with it and be thankful for the small victories."

The prayer card for Discipleship asks us to pray for our Sunday School and Grace Group teachers and our small group leaders. What a privilege we have to pray for people like Lisa.

During Week 2: 2022 Vision – Building Up the Body of Christ Through Fellowship, Mark reminded us all Why church fellowship is so important.

- 1.) We all need fellowship.
- 2.) We all need encouragement to keep going the right way and to turn from going the wrong way.
- 3.) We all need unconditional love and acceptance.
- 4.) We all need help. ***"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."***—1 Corinthians 12:26 and
- 5.) Our world needs a picture of Jesus.

Linda is one of the people who does so many things behind the scenes and I know she has many spiritual gifts. She is often in the middle of our fellowship efforts. She helps prepare our communion trays when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. She helps decorate our church during Christmas. But this picture of her is on a Game Day Saturday where she is serving up wonderful concession breakfast and lunches. She takes great delight in making sure people feel at home in our Fellowship Hall that we call the ROC foyer. The PRAYER CARD for Fellowship encourages us to Pray that God would use us to fellowship with others who need connection. Thank you, Linda for helping to make that opportunity for many of us.

Last Sunday, Bill shared the 2022 Vision – Building Up the Body of Christ Through Worship--worship that lasts all week long. I hope your week was one of worship during the regular, ordinary moments—that praying without ceasing that we are called to do and be. Worship is our response to God's presence in our lives and in our midst. We Worship within community. Remember the film clip from Backdraft *"You Go, We Go."* Sunday is the Tip of the Iceberg. Worship is our rehearsal for Heaven but Worship is also in our daily Walk. Jesus is in our midst today and everyday.

Here is a picture of one of our faithful Campus Hospitality Team Members, Jim. Jim's spiritual gifts are giving and serving. A year and ½ ago when we began in person worship again, Jim volunteered to welcome worshipers in our Foyer. He is a natural for it and he is a great first impression for our guests and visitors as they enter our building every Sunday to experience God's presence as we gather to worship. He answered why did you decide to serve on the Hospitality team by saying simply *"They were opportunities to Give and Serve to Redland Baptist Church, its members and community."* He also shared that he has learned that he *"always receives more from serving/giving than the time and effort it takes!"*

Our Worship segment on the PRAYER CARD asks us to pray that the Body of Redland will experience God's presence through corporate worship.

Some think ministry is something the professionals are called to do—I don't think that is what many Redlanders think because I see so many of you doing wonderful acts of service and ministry throughout the week. It is truly a privilege to get to witness all of the ways you serve Christ. This is a picture of Lori. Over these past 7 years, I cannot tell you the times I have driven into the parking lot first thing in the morning or coming back from lunch or an appointment and seen Lori weeding one of our flower beds or planting flowers to serve our church. She is a blessing to me and to all of us. ***“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. . . .so that you may live a life worth of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all the power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.”*** Colossians 1: 9a;10-11

Braeden, one of our youth is finding the joy it is to serve others. He has aged out of Upward. He is now a youth and busy with lots of activities but many Saturday mornings, he is up early and serving in the concessions and making a difference in the body of Christ and having fun.

Today our text comes from Paul's letters to the Romans, Chapter 12. In one of the most theologically rich letters from Paul is one of my favorite chapters which lives some of my most treasured verses. If you are able and in honor of God's word, let's stand together as we read from Romans, chapter 12:

ROMANS 12 NIV

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The word of the Lord. . . . Thanks be to God! You may be seated

The end of chapter 11 says ***“For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”*** Another way of say ***“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:20). And so Paul begins chapter 12 with In view of God's mercy, brothers and sisters...

What is he calling us to do? 3 things in the first 2 verses:

1. Offer our bodies as living sacrifices
2. Allow our minds to be transformed
3. Give assent to God's will for our lives

Offer our bodies as living sacrifices

The Old Testament sacrifices were dead sacrifices. Our sacrifice is to be a commitment of our lives—our time, our energy, our emotions. Paul calls this worship or service. It is ministry—and we are all called to it. Not with our leftover time at the end of the day but with our whole self. You couldn't sacrifice a part of an animal and you can't offer just part of your life to God. He wants all of it. This phrase is sometimes translated "service of worship" which not only means the adoration of God but our Christian life and activity.

In the end of chapter 11, Paul has just told us ***"Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and for him are all things."*** We know that before a Priest could serve in Israel, he had to present himself in a consecrated condition and any sacrifices he offered had to be without any defects. Because we have a new relationship with Christ, it will make a difference in our relationship with God and with others—but how is that possible? What is this true and proper worship. Service or ministry is always a part of worship.

At the end of 2021 and the beginning of this year, I began considering this text in light of Building Up the Body of Christ. I came under a little bit of conviction about this living sacrifice...all of us work hard and sometimes that work leads to the point of exhaustion—and it is a good type of exhaustion. But I was convicted that most days, I had just the energy to meet the required efforts and I was feeling closer to "burn-out" than is healthy. And I had relied too long on the falsehood, *"I just don't have time to take better care of myself...maybe when things get less stressful."* So it took a couple of weeks, but I found a gym to join and made a plan to invest in my physical health with as much intention as I usually give to my spiritual health. It has meant reordering my daily priorities. It has meant not conforming to old patterns and being transformed by new ways of thinking about health. It is still very early in the process of this mind transformation in this particular area.

Allow our minds to be transformed

This sounds like a lot—and it is. And it sounds impossible and it can be... but Paul shares with us how we can do this. ***"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** The world is a powerful, prevalent influencer but the Holy Spirit is more powerful than the world. We are told in I Peter 2 that ***"you are a chosen people...God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."***

God has given each of us who follow Christ the Holy Spirit to live in us. ***"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst?"*** Jesus told us in John 16 ***"When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."*** The Holy Spirit has all the power to transform and renew our minds—if we surrender ourselves to his guiding. ***"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing and rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."*** Titus 3:5

It's like a dance. When I was learning to dance around the kitchen table as a little girl, I had to learn to let my Dad lead. I had ideas about what was the next best step and so sometimes my feet got stepped on by my Dad's cowboy boots. Allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us—to guide us—is sometimes hard. It was and is hard for me. But when I was a child, there was no one I trusted more on earth than my father—and we can trust our heavenly father in the same way. He has given us his spirit to guide us—to lead us around the kitchen table. It's a much sweeter dance if we let God lead.

Give assent to God's will for our lives

And once we allow the Holy Spirit to lead and teach us, the next step becomes our nature—we will know, by the power of the Spirit, his good, pleasing and perfect will. We will hear that voice that Isaiah 30 speaks of ***"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"*** Your toes will be safe, your life choices will be secure and you can dance with confidence into your life of ministry and service.

A nice segue into the next section—many of us have a great deal of self-confidence. Paul challenges us to replace our self-confidence with a God-confidence **“in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.”** We usually develop a healthy self-confidence as we grow up and accomplish things, succeed at school, in sports, at work, in friendships. He urges us to use **“sober judgement”**, humility, or an honest spirit-led evaluation. Self-confidence isn’t wrong but it is part of the pattern of this world—but the more determinate way we should think about ourselves is as a **child of God.**

And all of God’s children have been given faith expressed as a spiritual gift or gifts. We are ALL of equal value to God. We may have different gifts or divine qualifications for tasks but we have the same value. It is our old human nature to compare ourselves with one another. Paul wants us to remember we are all part of the same body of Christ—and that body of Christ is to offer a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. We do have different functions.

In this chapter, Paul describes the functions or gifts as communal spiritual gifts. They are not for our individual benefit but for the building up of the body. The different gifts are a gift by God’s grace. One of the most important things emphasized by Paul is that the church is one body in Christ with different members. Our diversity in giftedness is the strength of our unity. Paul says we have different gifts and he enumerates seven in this passage. I’ve seen lists of seven, nine, fourteen, sixteen and twenty-one but let’s look at these seven and see how Paul speaks about the grace we are to offer with these gifts if they have been given to us:

Prophecy—in accordance with your faith through the Holy Spirit

Serving—Practically serve fellow believers with their material needs--Nancy is shown here. She has been a member for a couple of years now. She said she has taken several spiritual gifts inventories but agrees that serving seems to be one of her dominant gifts. She does many things but each week she helps my Sunday by being our current Extended Care Coordinator. It allows me to be present here in worship for at least one of the services. But her service not only serves me, it serves our families and it serves those families who arrive the first time hoping that we have a safe place for their preschool children.

Nancy answered the questions about why she decided to serve and what she enjoys and has learned this way: *“There was a need in this area. I felt I had experience in recruiting people to volunteer for the extended care nursery. With so much negativism surrounding us, I enjoy being reminded of the generosity, goodness, and kindness of people. The individuals we recruit to volunteer are so giving of their time to work with the children. It is uplifting to associate and to connect with such amazing people. These are God's people at work.*

“In addition, the children themselves are adorable. Watching the interaction between children and volunteers demonstrates the great love of God being passed on. Despite the abnormality of Covid, God's love still permeates through the masks to our children in the nursery in such a gentle way through our volunteers. Through volunteering, we connect to others. When we volunteer, we are doing God's work. We don't get paid with money, but it is a job, and we are paid with satisfaction in knowing we are helping others. When we volunteer, we are generously giving of a most valuable commodity--our time. It is a wonderful way to love another.”

The next spiritual gift in our list is Teaching—teach with the knowledge about Christian living from scripture—Mike and Craig are coaching one of the Upward Teams this year. Now you may say this isn’t really teaching. I can assure you coaching is very much teaching and it is how many if not most of us learn those powerful life lessons. And Upwards is designed to give the kids and families what they want—a fun, recreational activity and skill but it is also a way for our church family to share the gospel with the children and their families. The kids hear Biblical truths at practice, during half-times and throughout that coaching relationship.

Next: Encouraging—give encouragement like in Acts 15: 30-31 **“So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.”** I have a dear friend in ministry who I met when I first moved to Maryland in 2007. She and her family have moved out of state but she and I regularly check in on each other. In the middle of the pandemic when life was pretty hard and I was pretty lonely living by myself, I got a small package in the mail with this magnet. It reads *“Great is thy Faithfulness. Morning by morning, new mercies I see, All I have needed they had has provided.”*

As I searched about where to put it, I found the perfect spot to place that encourage promise from her and from God. It is on my medicine cabinet. I can't ignore that truth. It greets me every morning and every evening. Folks, many us can be using our text messages and emojis as quick ways to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ. *"The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message."*

Giving—give generously without regret—Walter serves in the leadership of our Upward Ministry. He gives hours each week during Upward Season. His children are grown—he is giving to serve the kingdom. Now I know he does enjoy it but all of us have things on the weekend we could do instead of serving but he prioritizes ministry for that season.

Leading—lead diligently without seeking the benefits of holding office—Annette is one of our *Grace In Store* Volunteers. She says she has given in encouragement, serving and administration. Here is what she said about why she is serving in *Grace in Store*: *"I loved the passion Sue had for the project! Being a long time "antique-er," I liked the thrift store concept. It helps people from all walks of life find what they may "need" or just find something they "want" to buy. The money Grace In Store makes go to a non-profit or person in need of help.*

"I love meeting people! Those who come for the first time as well as building friendships with those who come back, some almost every week! I have been a volunteer, in a lot of different areas, most of my adult life. I have been blessed by those I have worked with and those who "are served". It does something special to my heart when I am actively involved in volunteer activities. It is a blessing to me." Annette is a trusted leader who leads with passion.

Showing Mercy—ministering cheerfully to the sick and needy and being gracious—This is Mimi. Now I took her picture as our new Media Center Librarian and she is serving in a very creative and diligent way there but as I was working on this sermon, I got one of the many emails that she and I have exchanged over the past 4 months about our Afghan Good Neighbor Project. She has anticipated needs the family has had in ways I never would have. She is often far out ahead of me in knowing what the next step is.

The email I got during the day on Wednesday was about an over the counter medicine the doctor wanted one of the family members to get. She had already made sure with another team member that they had a small starter supply and was working on getting the necessary amount later that same day.

So here is the kicker—if we fail to have an honest evaluation of our gifts, we may try to do a service we aren't called to do—and that disrupts the unity. But the opposite is true—and I think much more common—because we fail to act by faith—that faith that God has given each of us, and because we often fail to remember the grace that God has made available to each of us, many spiritual gifts go under used, undervalued and to use the spiritual fruit allegory—"rotting on the vine". This should not be. Ephesians 5 says ***"¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."*** The body of Christ can only thrive when everyone puts the body first ahead of our individual desires.

Again spiritual gifts are meant to edify the body of Christ. They are not to be used as weapons or means to a power grab. In I Thessalonians 5, we hear Paul's clear instructions to God's church: ***"²⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. ¹² Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else."***

In our Romans 12 passage, Paul reminds us that our love for each other is to be sincere, authentic—seeking after good not evil. And to be devoted to each other—devoted is much more than tolerant. If we fail to love one another, we cast doubt on the value of our Christian life and community. We honor God when we recognize the transforming work he has done in the lives of our brothers and sisters and rejoice because of it.

The first fruit of the spirit is Love in Galatians 5: ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.”*** All the other fruits would leave a sour taste without love. Love is part of the two great commandments in Matthew 22:37-40 ³⁷ ***Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*** ***And the God of love hates evil.***

And then he instructs us to stay motivated—that can seem impossible when life becomes hard because of spiritual warfare or difficult, challenging times. And Paul in his wisdom shares a timeless truth or verse that helps in virtually all circumstances: ***“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”***

I first came across this verse my senior year in college. I was a biochemistry major in college. But by my senior year, I knew I was headed to Seminary to prepare for ministry but I was far along in my undergraduate course of study so it made sense to finish it and I did enjoy it. But that fall semester, I was taking 9 hours of upper level chemistry courses and a 4 hour senior level biochemistry course—it was a difficult semester. I felt afflicted. I needed the courses to graduate—to enroll in seminary but maybe not to ever use again. It was brutal. But those courses were part of a larger picture...God's larger plan for my life—for my service. And a friend made me this small piece of art work for my dorm room. Be Joyful in Hope, Patient in Affliction, Faithful in Prayer. It has been my steady companion for over 32 years now.

Two weeks ago, Sue found a small scripture rubber stamp that someone had donated to Grace In Store. She is just an encourager to so many in our congregation and she wanted to encourage and bless me. Here is how Sue answered her questions about using her spiritual gifts: *“I believe God has given me the gift of encouragement and perhaps faith , not that my faith is so great but the longer I serve Him , the more I know Him and the more I’ve come to experience His complete Trustworthiness. We were sad when Grace in had to close during those first months of Covid. We had come to know many of our neighbors and we worried about job loss and food insecurities. Nancy brought me a snapshot of a makeshift self serve pantry made in a church sign she had seen near where she lived.*

“We thought maybe we can put up some temporary shelves with canned goods and let our customers know and spread the word . We never fathomed the pandemic would last so long or that our little pantry would be so used and appreciated. I’m so glad the pantry worked. It gave an opportunity for all of us to do something . Never think “if we can’t do a big thing don’t do anything.” God uses even a cup of cold water in His name . Now, not only do our congregants supply the shelves but dozens of Derwood neighbors bring items regularly and Redland is known in Derwood as caring for the needy.

“God says we are His Workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do the good works He prepared in advance for each of us. Ministering allows me to join God where He’s working, to love Him with all my heart and my neighbor as myself working out the plans he mapped out in advance to further His Kingdom. I don’t want to miss one of those good works He prepared in advance for me. Volunteering is such a fulfillment. It’s a satisfying deep-abiding joy when your passions and giftedness are matched with your place of service. It doesn’t mean all the work is easy and fun but it is soul satisfying and it builds up the body of Christ when we each find our place to serve.

“I feel I’ve been given a front row view of God’s daily provisions and even miraculous workings as I volunteer at Grace in Store. I’ve come to know and love people that God wanted me to know and make Him known to. I long for every single body part to find their sweet spot of partnership with our Creator, living out the good works He lovingly planned in advance for us for our great joy and for His Great glory.”

Sue has heard me use Romans 12:12 multiple times and she walked the stamp over to my office. She had no idea that I would be using Romans 12 in this vision sermon today. On your chairs are an encouragement to you. I spent some time using that stamp to share an encouraging word with you today, which is one of my spiritual gifts. We are called to share with the Lord's people, and you are the people the Lord has put in my sphere. This gift of hospitality is to remind you to share the love of Christ with others as you have opportunity—as you seek opportunity.

Together we rejoice together, mourn together, and work to live in unity together—whatever our gifts are. And as we are living devoted to one another, the world will see our love for one another. As Paul continues his teaching, he challenges us to not pay back evil—to our fellow Christians or our enemies. We are to not give the non believer any excuse to not follow Christ because of our behavior. And then Paul challenges us to do ALL that we can to live at peace with EVERYONE, not just those to whom we are devoted.

Here is a picture of one of our young adults, Holly. I think I always see her smiling. She is coaching an Upward team this season. I am volunteering as a referee and the games I referee are usually the age group she is coaching so I get to hear her encourage her players and she is awesome. But last week, she came up after the game and encouraged me, the ref. As far as it depends on her, she is living at peace with everyone.

Being kind, turning the other cheek, going the second mile—however you describe it, this is our challenge and our responsibility. We can bless those who persecute us with God’s grace. It will cause our enemy to consider the claims of Christ. He or she can’t simply ignore how we represent Christ. Sometimes we let the fact that our beliefs are right give us permission to ignore the concerns of the unbelieving world. The battle lines with the world have been drawn and sometimes we are more committed to winning the argument than hearing others’ well meaning concerns—even if their conclusions or logic are not biblically based.

As Christians, we can take the higher road—we don’t have to win. God has already won. We can be kind; we can listen; we can be understanding without being complicit in sinful behavior. We can disagree without being disagreeable. It is how we are to overcome evil: ***“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”***

So back to my adventure in the gym. I have been working with a trainer and he is wanting me to focus on 3 areas: Flexibility, Balance and Strength. I knew before I joined the gym that I’m not very flexible and so I wasn’t really surprised to learn that I am even less flexible than I was in high school. But what I didn’t understand until the trainer explained it was that the deficit in flexibility was impacting my strength and power. And that with the resulting deficit in some areas of strength, my balance is pretty shaky.

He had me stand on one leg on this cushy mat. I couldn’t keep my balance. I told him (with some confidence) that I could do it on the solid ground. He stopped me and said yes but it is important that our balance is strong enough to handle uncertain ground. And as much as I was wanting to stand upright in the moment, I wanted to stop and make some notes on my phone.

I think that is where we are as a church and why our vision this year is building up the body of Christ. We have all become more inflexible these past few years because we have been forced to be so flexible with the constant changing world and we are ready to stop being flexible. Our strength has been depleted by lots of challenges. And our balance is wavering as we try to accomplish things on shifting ground.

We need to build up our body in a spiritual sense. It may mean working on unused muscle groups, it may mean learning to work in groups again instead of just our household bubble. It may mean thinking beyond survival of the next week or month with school or work and again making long term plans. Ministry may look different now than it did 2 years ago but it can still be done because the Holy Spirit still empowers us.

The song Kenn sang before I began speaking also had this stanza *“Sometimes I feel disappointed by the way I spend my time. How can I further Your kingdom when I’m so wrapped up in mine?”* I think that is a question that, if we are honest, we all need to ask ourselves. Our instinct is to be conformed to this world—we have to put forth extra energy to be transformed and renew our minds—so that our living sacrifice is to the Holy God and not our earthly idols.

The song continues with these words which is my invitation for you this morning:

“Though I’m living a good life, can my life be something great? I have to answer the question before it’s too late...I’ll embrace every moment I’m given. There’s a reason I’m alive for a blink of an eye. If I give the very best of me that becomes my legacy.”

Jesus is our living sacrifice that saves us for eternity. He offers us that gift and then gives us opportunity to serve along side him. Wherever you are on that journey of faith, won't you join Him in offering yourself as a living sacrifice.

INVITATION

Thank you for your special attention this morning. On your prayer cards for Care-Ministry you are asked to pray for 3 things:

1. Pray for another member of the Body at Redland
2. Pray that Redland will be sensitive to needs and serve others in love
3. Pray and ask God how you might minister to another in a specific way.

Let's pray: Lord, we do want to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. Help us to be sensitive to the needs of those we encounter in our daily lives and be willing to serve others in love. Help us to not think "oh someone should do something" but be willing to be that someone. And Lord if someone this morning needs to meet you in a personal way because of your sacrifice for their sins, may they find the courage and the clear direction to step out and follow you. Lord we pray this in the name of him, who is our living sacrifice and in view of his mercy, Jesus. Amen.