

“Place in the choir”

A sermon by Cathy Love

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Our Children’s story today is actually a music video that is the lead in to the message this morning. For those on the phone, it is a children’s version of the video Place in the Choir by Celtic Thunder. When I heard this song a while ago, a person, who most of us would walk away from, was playing it for their child. I had forgotten the song but as soon as I heard it, I recalled how much I loved it and I hummed it for weeks. I knew right away there was a message in this song but struggled to discern what God was asking of me. What was the message behind the song? Let’s listen and see what you think.

Children’s story Cathy – video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPSBzD775Dc>

Readings: Psalm 139: 1-6, 13 – 18; 1 Corinthians 12: 1 – 31; Romans 12:3 - 8

Let’s set our hearts and minds to hear the message. Let us pray.

Gracious God, we pray that we would hear your word in the chaos of this world. You give us so much and we sometimes struggle to know how to respond to You and to know what You are asking of us. We ask you to open our hearts and minds to Your word. Amen.

As I mentioned, I heard this song a while ago, felt there was a message in it but could not figure out the message. So, I began to analyze what drew me to the song, why I couldn’t shake it from my mind and what I felt it meant. I prayed for direction because I just could not figure out why God seemed to be drawing me back to this song and the message to share.

I thought of the analogy of a choir – of any kind, of any size. This song is a cute reminder that we all have a place in God’s choir. If you think of the words, it reminds us that there are the many voices that join together to give a musical message – “listen to the bass it’s the one at the bottom, listen to the top with the little birds singing and the cat and dog they take up the middle. Some sing low and some sing higher, some sing out loud on the telephone wire. Some just clap their hands or paws or anything they’ve got now.”

Let’s explore that thought. In the choir, everyone sings their parts, sometimes other instruments are added to enhance the musical presentation but each, individual person and part comes together to make the beautiful harmonized sound of the choir.

Some members are blessed with the gift of a beautiful voice and the ability to hold their part while they sing solos, duets, or other combinations. Some people can play an instrument and still hold their part while joining with others. Some people can pick up a piece of music and read the notes and know what it sounds like. Many of us prefer to stay in the background and sing our parts.

As you can see, a choir is made up of so many people doing their part and bringing their gifts.

In our choir’s experience, we have been challenged at times with pieces that require a fabulous leader with a vision, a lot of practice, sometimes the addition of a vocal coach, faith, supporting each other, working hard, and practice and did I say faith????

At times, guests are invited to take a lead on a Sunday to let the choir have a break and to expand our musical experiences.

In each of these scenarios, we have a group of people, a leader and we are directed overall by God. But that was not the whole message behind the song.

Then I thought about the animals in the Bible and the role they all play? Daniel in the Lion's den, Noah's arc, Jonah and the whale, goats and calves, right down to the sparrow.

How many times have people read Genesis without pondering that God gave Adam the job of naming the animals? Was that trust of God in Adam? Was that a gift Adam had? Is this a focus? While it was an interesting fact, I couldn't figure out where it would go.

Was it about our roles in the Church and outside of the Church? Was it about gifts? Had we heard this message too often?

So, I had a chat with Frances who suggested I check out Paul's messages. Well this began some heavy reading and researching. Paul seems to have a lot to say however, there was a common theme in his message. About Jesus being our leader, our choir director, the head of our body.

Although there are so many differences between all of us, we are one in the body of Christ. For example, we have different families, are gifted differently, come from different backgrounds, have different familial demographics, different jobs, and different faith paths but we all have a role to play in God's choir.

Paul speaks of how the least of the body parts are the more necessary parts, but all our body parts intertwine and rely on each other to keep us alive and moving. Our various body parts are naturally fitted for the good of the whole. God's gifts are given to us to bless and build up the whole body of the Church.

Our readings this morning and other Biblical passages reinforce the message that with Christ as the head, the general assembly members make up the Church as one body.

This is how our Church functions. Everyone one of us, whether we know it or not, plays a role in keeping our Church functioning so God's message may be spread in the world. As with the choir analogy, each of our gifts is important and each person who presents their gifts for use to glorify God's work in the world, is an integral part of the team. How many gifts are not being explored? And why?

Listen to Paul's own words about himself in Ephesian's 3 verses 7 to 9

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me, to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Ephesians reminds us that the work of the Ministry is for every believer. We need to continue to share God's message even if we too feel we are less than the least of all the Lord's people.

Some of you know my story of my reluctant response to a call by God to become the worship leader here at Calvin. When Frances first approached me, I had an endless list of reasons as to why this was a bad idea. First and foremost was my feeling that I was not worthy, not knowledgeable enough in things biblical, not Christian enough, there were so many other people I felt should do the job justice, what if I say the wrong thing and I was just too busy – for God.

While I would never compare myself to Paul, I also felt like I was less than others in all things of faith. Then I developed a pinched nerve in my neck that brought my life to a grinding halt. Things I took for granted and my body movements were no longer easily managed. I learned just how interconnected body parts are and how very important the least of these parts are to the ability to move.

Long story short, I was home with the ability to do very little for a long time. The role of worship leader for me came to fruition and now I tease others about not saying no to God. Since then, God has fired my thirst for knowledge and my need to grow as a Christian.

While I still have so much to learn and still feel so unworthy, God has lead me to growth opportunities and the strength to pursue them. I have, with trepidation, signed up for courses and most recently, “attended” the Getty conference on-line. This independent study has helped me grow and equipped me for my journey.

This journey has ignited a passion and a joy that I didn’t know existed deep within me and that I would never have identified and explored on my own. If someone had asked for volunteers for this position, I would have moved to the back of the Church and sat behind a bigger person with my head down or maybe lay down completely.

This gift became visible only when it was identified and I used it.

I have had many people say to me they couldn’t do what I do. I said the same thing. I am still not the most well versed in the Bible, and I still look around at many of you and think you could do this job. But it appears for now, that God has decided it is my time in this role and God is leading me. It is amazing to me how I receive His message and how He leads me in what to say. My faith in God was obviously not strong enough until I opened my mind to Him.

So, what is your role? What is it you think you could never do? What do you think is so insignificant as to not be an important role? Do you look at others and think, I would love to try that role on, but they seem to know so much, they seem so much smarter than I could ever be in that role? Are you also giving human doubts to God’s plan? Is He pushing you in a direction that you feel is way beyond your comfort level?

Frances reminded me that the intricacy of our temperament impacts us as we explore our gifts. Add to that interests, experiences and opportunity and our roles may become clearer.

For example, let’s explore the idea of a person who is compassionate. What if they are an extrovert? This person may thrive on working with the public, and may enjoy volunteering in places such as a soup kitchen, a hospital, a children’s place or a homeless shelter. But an introvert with the gift of compassion might prefer to write cards, make phone calls, rock babies in a hospital or visit one on one. Both of these types are necessary in the work of the Lord.

I strongly encourage you to have a prayerful conversation with God and, if you are still unsure, consider asking God to lead you to talk to someone you trust in the Church because as we move forward, there will be so many roles to perform. In some of the roles, there are people who would love to have more support, there are teams who could use some bolstering of numbers.

You don’t have to be a lead, maybe you are the cow that just goes moo, but that cow still has a job. Even though it is a different day and time, and we are all in different positions, collectively and individually we can make a difference. With our generosity and creativity, God’s message can be shared.

IN 1 Kings 5 we read about Solomon building the temple where God would always reveal his presence and glory. The plans for the temple were revealed to David. This temple represented a dwelling place for God, as well as a place for the people to gather to worship God. But it is in the building of the temple that we see the messages of Paul coming to life. King Solomon gathered labourers from all Israel. Thirty thousand men.

They worked in shifts of ten thousand a month so they spent a month in Lebanon and two months at home. He worked with large numbers of carriers, stonemasons and foremen. At the king’s command they removed from the quarry, large blocks of high-grade stone to provide a foundation of dressed stone for the temple. (The craftsman of Solomon and Hiram and workers from Byblos cut and prepared the timber and stone for the building of the temple.) All these people had the same gifts and the same goal. As one group tired, the next group moved in.

Even working in such an organized manner, it took seven years to complete the temple. King Solomon realized that although many people share talents, skills and abilities, it was the joining together of these people that allowed the task to be completed to glorify God.

Look at how the Zoom idea came to fruition! Just because COVID happened and we were no longer able to worship together in the sanctuary, we didn’t just stop worshipping. People put their heads together and

made it happen with faith, prayer and lots of hard work and problem solving. The plan is always growing and evolving and many people have joined in to explore their abilities.

God challenges us to move forward in unconventional ways but if we think of the teaching of Paul, Paul did not sit around waiting for someone to spread the word, he got out there and did what he felt called to do. Despite many obstacles including being jailed for his belief, no matter where he was, Paul spoke the same message just as God calls Christians to speak. Paul's message is of unity among believers and their mutual participation of the various gifts of the Spirit.

No matter what our thoughts or roles or gifts or where they take us, we should find comfort in God's words to Paul at Acts chapter 18 verse 9.

God spoke these words to Paul when Paul was feeling human, inner feelings. God said "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

All of us as Christians, no matter what our role, gift or place in the choir are called to speak the same message. We are one body with Christ as the head.

Blackaby Ministries posted this comment on their website on June 20.

Don't focus on your talents, abilities, and interests to determine God's will. Instead, seek God's will and watch Him equip you for whatever assignment He gives. -Experiencing God.

I do believe this to be true. If we all hear God's word and find our gifts, our place in God's choir will become clear. The choir needs leaders and all the parts to come together to make a beautiful noise unto the Lord.

The world has changed significantly since I first started writing this. Where I saw my path clearly, it has changed, I am no longer completely sure where it is going but I know who is leading me. I know I must follow God's lead and have faith we will get there together.

All this because a parent played a song for their child.

Let us Pray

Gracious and Loving God. We are here, your choir, the body of the church, waiting to spread your word. We ask that you help each of us explore our gifts. Give us the courage to step out of our comfort level and trust that you will equip us for our assignments to further Your work. We pray for your guidance as we go forward in faith. Amen.