Series: I Love My Church

Message: 03 Love By Serving 1 Cor 12\_4-7 Rom 12\_3-8

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; Romans 12:3-8

Theme: The important role serving plays in communicating love.

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What do superheroes and Christmas presents have to do with a church?

That’s the question I want to answer today as we continue in our I Love My Church series.

The implications of the answer to this question for our church family are bigger than you can imagine.

**If you would turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 12 (page 959).**

In the first week of this series we saw that were are called to love our church. I am not talking about the building or the programs but the people—who are the church.

This love, and the way we express it, is a powerful witness to the world around us of the love Christ offers them.

As we saw last week, we are to love in community. We are to live connected lives with the people in our church.

But we build fences, fences that either keep people out or keep us in as we hide behind them.

And, just as Christ has torn down the fence of sin that separates us from a holy God, Christ has united us together.

We must not hide behind fences. We need to tear down the fences that are between and consider, strategize, how we can stir one another up to love and good works.

**Superheroes and superpowers.**

When you were growing up, did you have a favorite superhero? Who was yours?

\*\*\*If appropriate in your context, allow people to make comments. As they do, describe the superhero’s powers.\*\*\*

I started out liking Batman. But then, I discovered Spiderman.

Spiderman, a normal guy who got his powers from a spider bite. Able to climb up walls, jump around like crazy, swing from webs, and anticipate danger with his spidy-sense.

Spiderman was the superhero in my book!

You can say this is all kids’ stuff, but millions of dollars in profits from superhero movies over the last few years would beg to differ.

There is something about superheroes that we are fascinated with.

I looked up the definition of “superhero” in Webster’s. It says that a superhero is “a fictional hero having extraordinary or superhuman powers; an exceptionally skillful or successful person.”

Now, I don’t mean to criticize Merriam-Webster on their role as the custodian of definitions. It is their business.

But, I don’t think this one is correct. It’s not inaccurate; it’s just incomplete.

Superheroes are more than just extraordinary, super-powered, exceptionally skilled people.

That’s not even half of what makes them who they are.

Superheroes are superheroes because they utilize their abilities within a specific context, community/city, to help in a specific way.

Who is the superhero of Metropolis? Superman.

Who is the superhero of Gotham? Batman, of course

Who is the superhero of New York City? Ok, there are a few. But the Peter Parker, a.k.a. Spiderman was based out of New York.

I don’t care what the superpower is that someone may claim to have, whether it is flying, fighting, webbing, running, strength, or anything else.

If they aren’t using that power in a specific context (location) to help in a specific way, then they’re just a dude sitting on the couch.

Having superpowers is one thing, but it takes action to make one a supper-hero.

The French novelist Leon Bloy, who was born in 1846, once said “Any Christian who is not a hero is a pig.”

I love that quote! And I believe the Bible affirms it.

Think about this. If you are a follower of Jesus, did you know that God has given you superpowers so that you can be a superhero?

I’m not saying that He’s made it possible for you to become famous and have movies made about you. Most of us will never be known widely.

But fame is not part of the equation in what makes a superhero.

A superhero is someone who utilizes his or her abilities in a specific context to help in a specific way.

In fact, I think part of loving your church is being the hero God has made you to be.

And the hero God has made you to be has superpowers, is part of a superpower team, and lives in a specific community in need.

**You Have Superpowers: Spiritual Gifts**

First Corinthians 12 starts off letting us know that Paul, the author of this letter, is going to talk about spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:1 reads: “**Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.**”

Skip down to verse 4, where Paul begins elaborating on these gifts and he says this:

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 “**Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”**

The part I want to zoom in on is the last part of verse 6: **God who empowers them all in everyone**.

What Paul is saying here is that God empowers gifts in all of His followers.

God gives each and every one of His followers at least one, sometimes more than one, spiritual gift.

A spiritual gift is a Holy Spirit–empowered ability that is given to serve others.

It is a spiritual superpower, if you will, given for you to use in a specific context to help in a specific way.

Though not exhaustive, some of these possible gifts are:

**Exhortation**— often called the “gift of encouragement.” The primary means of exhortation is to remind the hearer of the powerful and amazing work of God in Christ, particularly in regard to the saving work of Jesus in the atonement.

**Giving**— is the special, God-given ability and enablement to contribute money, time, material resources, and one’s self to the work of the Lord with cheerfulness and liberality.

**Leadership**— is the special, God-given ability to set goals and to motivate others in the body of Christ to accomplish them.

**Mercy**—is the special, God-given enablement to compassionately aid suffering or undeserving people, and to readily forgive them or spare them from punishment or penalties justly deserved.

**Service/Helps**—is the special, God-given enablement to provide timely assistance that may release other Christian workers for direct spiritual ministry.

**Teaching**—is the special, God-given enablement to give a detailed understanding of biblical truth to those who are willing to learn.

**Discernment**—is the special, God-given enabling to distinguish between truth and error, good and evil, the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist.

**Faith**—is the special, God-given enablement to discern the Lord’s will and act on it with unwavering belief and trust in God’s ability.

**Knowledge**—is the special, God-given enablement to gather and analyze information; especially God’s revealed truth in the Bible, and to use it effectively.

**Wisdom**—is the special, God-given enablement to use knowledge effectively, coupled with a reverential awe of God.

There are two really important things to remember about spiritual gifts:

**First, God is the one who picked your gift**.

The passage tells us that God is the one who empowers us.

Romans 12:6 says that we have “**…gifts that differ according to the grace given to us**…”

It’s important to realize that we didn’t apply, request, campaign, petition, or do a kick-starter to get these gifts going.

God, in His infinite wisdom, love, care, and power, knew exactly which gifts you needed and which gifts were best suited for you.

So don’t waste time being jealous of someone else’s gift when you should be spending time developing your own.

Just think, God blessed you and entrusted you with this specific ability to make a difference in your church, community, and the world!

**Secondly, your gift is a Spirit-empowered gift.**

When you hear the list of possible gifts, you might be doing a proverbial scratching of the head.

You might be stumped, thinking, “I’ve had some really good teachers in my life and some of them didn’t love God, didn’t even like Him.

How can they be a good teacher if they weren’t given the gift of teaching?”

Great question, if you were thinking that. The thing to realize is that there are a lot of really good teachers out there, some amazing, incredible teachers out there.

But there’s a difference between great teaching and teaching empowered by the Spirit.

One is exhibiting their natural ability (which is also God-given I might add) and the other is exhibiting an ability infused by the power of the Spirit of God to speak in such a way that surpasses the mere passing on of information and inspiration.

One teaching with the spiritual gift of teaching does so while being led by the Spirit, guided by the Spirit, powered by the Spirit, supported by the Spirit, and sustained by the Spirit.

That’s incredibly different.

Think of it like this: When Mike Tyson, even in retirement, throws a punch, it is going to be powerful and it is going to hurt.

Even more so if it was thrown during his prime. That’s his natural talent.

When Superman throws a punch, it is going to hurt way more. There’s more than natural ability going on, there’s something supernatural happening.

There were many great leaders throughout history, but someone leading with the gift of leadership is exhibiting something supernatural.

You have been given an amazing ability to be used by God!

That is incredibly exciting. It might also be slightly confusing because the natural question is, “What are my gifts?”

Here are three ways you can discover your gifting:

**1st. Experiment in serving.**

Get involved in the church somewhere. If you’re not sure where, then…

Worship and Celebration, ushers, greeters, sound or video, the decorating team, Fellowship, Member Care, buildings and grounds, missions, Nursery, King’s Kids, Lighthouse Friends, or with the youth group, or adult Sunday school.

Maybe you can serve in prayer, or writing notes of encouragement.

Try out a ministry for a month or two. After that time ask yourself how it is going. Ask the leader how it is going.

If you are both ecstatic about what you’ve been able to do, then what you’ve been doing might make clear what your gifting is.

If one or both of you feel it is just not your area, then don’t be discouraged—move on to something else.

The big thing is, where do you see results?

Specifically, where do you see results of impacting people for Jesus?

If you are gifted in a specific way, then it is going to bring people to Jesus, help people in their relationship with Jesus, show people Jesus, etc.

Having given this suggestion, I don’t think it can be separated from the next two …

**2nd. Ask others.**

Ask specific people whom you’ve spent time with, whom you trust and know they love you, the ways they see God using you in the church community.

Specific questions you could ask them are:

• When you hear the different spiritual gifts, which one(s) come to mind when you think of me?

• What am I doing when you see Jesus in me or coming out of me?

• How is it that I make this community better?

Remember—this isn’t to give us a big head. This is to help us discover how God has gifted us.

No one will know better than the people you are in community with and serving with.

**3rd. Check your energy level.**

As you try different serving opportunities, ask yourself how you’re feeling. If you are tired, dreading going to the serving opportunity, or not feeling a lot of passion, then whatever you’re doing probably isn’t something you’re gifted in.

(It may be a wrong context for your gift though, so be mindful of that. A “right gift, wrong setting” type of thing.)

If you are ready to go, looking forward to the opportunity, feeling passion about it, then that is more than likely something that complements your gifting.

Whatever your gift(s) are, they were supernaturally given to you by God.

They are something you are empowered by the Spirit to do, not for your own gain but for the benefit of others.

You have a superpower in the church. But you’re not alone!

**You Have a Superpower Team: The Church**

The thing I love about the movie The Avengers is that it wasn’t about one person. The Avengers were a team, an ensemble, a group.

They couldn’t meet the specific needs of earth alone; they needed one another.

This is God’s plan for you and me as well. Listen to Romans 12:

Romans 12:3-8 “**For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.**

**4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**

**6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.**

This passage complements what we read in 1 Corinthians 12, that you and I need one another.

Here’s the thing that might be hard to grasp, but we have to allow the Scriptures to guide us:

**Your gift was not given to you for you!**

The Bible teaches that spiritual gifts were given to us but for others.

What does 1 Corinthians 12:7 say but that your gifts and my gifts were given “**for the common good**”?

Your gifts were given to you to help others, to serve others, to benefit others.

They weren’t given for you and your enjoyment.

Romans 12:4-5 is going to clarify that we purposely and specifically by design don’t all function the same way with our gifting. We have different giftings because we need one another.

Romans 12:5 even takes it so far as to say that we are “**members one of another,**” meaning each member belongs to all the others.

So your gifts aren’t yours; they’re mine. And my gifts aren’t really mine; they’re yours.

Because God made the DNA of this church to be supernaturally infused with all of these gifts.

(Spread your arms wide in front of the crowd indicating you are talking about everyone.)

This should be a lesson in both humility and responsibility for us all.

Humility because the gift is not about us, but responsibility because God knew someone else would need our help, would need to experience God working through our gifts to minister to them.

Thor couldn’t save the world on his own; he needed the rest of the Avengers. It was the same for the rest of them.

The truth of the matter is that God doesn’t need any of us, but He chooses to use us and invites us to be used by Him—but He does that by bringing us together, mobilizing us together, teaming us up together, using us together.

Sure, there’s strength in numbers. But numbers brought together by the hand of God and empowered by God … that’s more than natural strength.

That’s the type of power that can change a church for God, change a community for God, change a nation for God, change the world for the Gospel.

You have been given superpowers. You are part of a superpower team.

But remember … to just have power isn’t what makes a hero. There has to be action.

**This Superpower Team Has a Community, the Ashland Richland county community in Need**

This church needs you. Our communities needs you.

This county/community needs you. Not because they need you, but because they need God.

And God in His wisdom and plan has decided that He would empower you with the ability to serve one another and the world around you.

We have a children’s ministry that needs people to model Jesus to them.

We have a teen ministry that needs people to model Jesus to them, befriend them, and mentor them.

Young adults, couples, who need the gifts that God gave you to be in action and in motion for them.

The community around us need the gifts that God gave you to be in action and in motion.

Can you imagine with me a little bit right now?

Can you imagine what our church would be like if everyone was flowing in their gifting?

Can you imagine what our community would be like, what the towns around us would be like, if we all were serving in ways that utilized the gifts that God has given us?

The Serve project this summer was just a taste of what can come.

Think about it, imagine it … and let’s take it back to our initial question.

What do superheroes and Christmas presents have to do with a church?

This is what I opened with. We talked a lot about superheroes, not a whole lot about Christmas. So let’s switch gears.

Christmas presents. Who doesn’t like opening Christmas presents?

I’ll tell you who—the Grinch! Grinches don’t like opening Christmas presents—everyone else does.

If you’re not too excited about opening Christmas presents, well, maybe we’ll get a Grinch support group going on, but until then, imagine back to childhood when you did love it.

Picture being six years old, coming down to the tree, and there was your present.

Maybe that wasn’t your Christmas experience—well, imagine what it would be like to come down and see that big present waiting for you.

Just waiting to be opened, just waiting to be discovered, just waiting to be enjoyed and used and played with.

And then picture looking at it, shrugging your shoulders, saying “eh,” and then walking back upstairs … never opening the gift.

There would be something super wrong with that, wouldn’t there be?!

We would need to start the HPWITCPTOTAETEOCG support group.

That is the “Helping-People-Who-Ignore-Their-Christmas-Presents-To-Open-Them-And- Experience-The-Excitement-Of-Childhood Group!”

Keep coming back.

When you’re given a gift, you open the gift! You don’t leave it sitting there!

What do superheroes and Christmas presents have to do with a church?

If you are a follower of Jesus who is not utilizing the spiritual gifts that God has given you for the betterment of the church and community, then you are like a Christmas present that’s ignored and unopened.

You are walking up to the gift that God has given you, shrugging your shoulders, saying “eh,” and then walking away.

And that’s not how it is supposed to be!

**Here’s my final question: Why did God give you to our church?**

Most of the time we ask what we can get out of church. Wrong question.

Why did God give this community the gift of you?

Was it because of your teaching, your leadership, your encouragement, your discernment, or whatever it is that makes you the super-powered you? Why did God give us the gift of you?

Don’t be an unopened gift. Discover the gifting God has empowered you with. Discover the ways you can passionately utilize those gifts.

Be the gift that you are—serve this church and this community the way God made you to with the gifts He’s given you.

Be a hero for Jesus. I can’t speak for you, but I know for myself … I want to be a hero for Jesus. I certainly don’t want to be a pig.

Specific Application: Pray! Seek God’s leading and be open to stepping out of your comfort zone. Be willing to try something new.

(Ask each of our ministry team leaders, Nursery and Kings Kids Coordinators to stand up. Introduce them.)

Each one of these folks have ministries and I am sure they would love to help you discover what your spiritual gift is and help you find the right place for you to be a hero for Jesus.

Don’t just pray about…do something!

**Benediction “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**