

SERMON - 1.14.07
1 Cor. 12 "Gifted for Mission"

G&P.....

Long before the legendary Iditarod Dog Sled Race was first run in 1973, a more important race took place in Alaska. On January 21, 1925, the lives of countless children in Nome were at stake. An epidemic of diphtheria had broken out, and the gold rush city did not have a sufficient amount of antitoxin. Dr. Curtis Welch telegraphed Fairbanks, Anchorage, Seward, and Juneau, asking for help. There were 300,000 units of the serum at a hospital in Anchorage, and it was the only serum in the entire state.

The problem was to get it to Nome in the shortest time possible. With the Bering Sea frozen and no railroad or roads extending to Nome's remote location, dog teams were the only solution. The hospital packed the 300,000 units in an insulated container and transported them to Nenana on an overnight train.

Once the serum arrived, a 674-mile relay race by dog teams awaited. Musher who delivered the mail normally covered that distance in a month. The first musher took the insulated cylinder of serum 52 miles, where he passed the lifesaving baton to the second musher, who traveled 31 miles. From musher to musher the relay continued until a total of 20 dog-sled drivers had cooperated to get the needed medicine to Nome by February 2nd. The lifesaving serum arrived in only 127 ½ hours due to the cooperative effort of individuals willing to brave the austere Alaskan wilderness, sub-zero temperatures, and blinding blizzards.

This life-saving mission is a picture of how God works through many people.

Greg Asimakoupoulos, Naperville, Illinois; source The 1925 Serum Run to Nome

This is the gift of the church, to look beyond ourselves and our own needs and to look to the needs and the hopes of others. For the gifts of the Spirit are for the communities of faith and for the communities of those who do not know Jesus.

Look at the list that St. Paul creates for us in his letter to the people in Corinth. A community that stood at the crossroads of the empire. All trade went through Corinth. It was a tough town, a center for many pagan practices such as temple prostitution, certainly the practice of worshiping the emperor.

St. Paul had started this church and addresses many of their issues as he writes to them about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

1CO 12:1 Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all people.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Paul wants us to live the gifts of the spirit. They are not to be put on the shelf or pushed away as if they were some kind of disease. If the Mushers do not share their gift of the sled dog, there is no story of children recovering to new health.

The gifts of God are given for two purposes:

First to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength. To say Jesus is Lord with all that we do and all that we say in our walks daily. To take time daily to pray those words, Jesus is Lord. To center our lives on Jesus who gives us forgiveness, love and balance in our lives. What happens when we are out of balance in our relationships with one another? Have we thought about how our relationship with Jesus is? Have we been in prayer? Have we been forgiving as we have been forgiven?

The story goes that a young man applied for a job as an usher at a theater in the mall. The manager asked him, "What would you do in case a fire breaks out?"

The young guy answered, "Don't worry about me. I'd get out okay."

But you're an usher! It isn't enough just to get out yourself. You are responsible for helping others get out.

If it is just me and Jesus, then we will miss the 2nd purpose of the gifts of God:
The second purpose is to love our neighbor as ourselves. TO move beyond ourselves.

This is the mission of the church, to help the neighbor in such a way that they come to know Jesus as Lord. In so doing we are energized for living and loving.

Lesslie Newbigin said:

Mission is not a burden laid upon the church; it is a gift and a promise to the church that is faithful. The command arises from the gift. Jesus reigns and all authority has been given to him in earth and heaven. When we understand that, we shall not need to be told to let it be known. Rather, we shall not be able to keep silent."

□Lesslie Newbigin, from Mission in Christ's Way Mission in Christ's Way (Friendship Press, 1988), p. 40; submitted by Kevin A. Miller, Vice President, Christianity Today International

Food, water, and health care for the Mahafale people in Madagascar

The Mahafale people of Madagascar are constantly beset by drought, famine, and nomadic changes. In response to their gospel calling, health workers associated with Ejeda Hospital, a Lutheran hospital in this southwestern part of Madagascar, have shown creativity, leadership and dedication in dealing with these and many other challenges.

The staff at Ejeda Hospital are engaged in a community-based program that addresses the most urgent needs of the Mahafale people. The program provides clean water, prenatal exams, immunizations for children and adults, growth monitoring for children under age 5, information about nutrition, and treatments for a variety of diseases. Four health care centers have been built and staffed as ways to reach out to the communities.

Food needs also are being addressed. The only thing readily available to eat is a mush made from the seeds of the Tamarind trees. They are very acidic and in their natural form will burn the stomach. Clay must be added to neutralize the acid. Additional food-producing projects have been initiated as well.

In addition to addressing the health and physical needs of the people, the Malagasy Lutheran

Church has made evangelism a priority. House-to-house visitations provide an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and often include an effort to teach adults to read and write. Over the last several years, more than 10,000 people have heard the gospel through such efforts, and hundreds of baptisms have resulted. In many cases, children have been baptized before their parents.

Funding through the ELCA has helped build wells that provide safe water. Funding also has helped to provide hand-grinding mills, plows, and oxen, along with boxes that can be used for solar cookers and bicycles to make transportation easier. Income generating activities, such as sewing cooperatives, help with the livelihood of those living in remote areas.

Ongoing support of the Mahafale program helps staff the hospital and provide health supplies, brings education and income generation to the people, and spreads the good news of Jesus.

Jesus, crucified and risen!

As Newbiggin says: **When we understand that, we shall not need to be told to let Jesus be known. Rather, we shall not be able to keep silent."**

This morning we have talked about the broader mission of the church as it reaches to the far reaches of the globe to help people live better and to win their hearts for Jesus Christ. Each of these stories challenge us with the gifts that God has given to us. This week this is my challenge:

What are your gifts? Forget the Scandinavian response that says, we have no gifts, we are too shy to tell you anyway. I want you to ask that question in prayer. What gifts do you have for mission? And for living our faith out there? For you have been saved through Jesus Christ for a purpose. Come next weeks as we continue to explore this purpose for living out the gospel of Jesus.

Jesus is Lord!

AMEN