

## You Are Needed

A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the third Sunday in ordinary time, January 25, 1997. Scripture Lessons: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

Before Christmas, Kay and I were sitting in the room reading. She'd just received the latest edition of *The House Speaker*, the official publication of *Ware Presbyterian Village*. "Listen to this, Ted!" she said. She proceeded to read an article written by Chaplain James Scotland. "Sometimes people ask me, 'What do you want for Christmas? Sick of the commercial hype, I have devised this answer: 'I want someone to need me. I want strength and faith to meet with courage whatever trials and sorrows or disappointments come my way. I want to grow closer to God, even when that means giving up some pet prejudices or angers. There is one other thing on my Christmas list, but it is something I can give instead of receive - I want to make the world a little better for having been here. I want to leave a pattern of service, to leave a mark of joy where I have stood.'"

"I want someone to need me." We all want someone to need us. The Apostle Paul wrote, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" If he were writing today he'd probably say, "The quarterback cannot say to the lineman, 'I have no need of you. Nor can the running back say to the pulling guard, 'I have no need of you.'" In other words, the Christian church is like a human body or a team. Every member is needed. Jesus needs every member to carry out his ministry. No member can say to another, "I have no need of you."

I visited a shut<sup>in</sup> for many years before she went to heaven. She was confined to her bed. She was blind. Every time I visited (and I didn't visit as often as I should have) she'd say, "I was praying for you this morning, for you and Kay, Andrew, Philip and Mark. I pray for you everyday." She'd never met Kay or my three sons. But she knew about them. She asked about them. And she prayed for us every day. She was needed. I needed her. The church needed her. Even though she was blind and confined to a wheel chair, she was needed. St. Paul said, "the

members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” She, and every member like her, is indispensable for the ministry of our church.

So many people feel unneeded. They don’t feel needed at work. Their boss makes them feel like they’re just a living tool, someone who can be easily replaced, like an interchangeable part. Recently a friend told me that he’d dropped out of a organization because, “I didn’t feel like I was being used.” None of us wants to be *used* in the sense of *taken advantage of*. But many of us want to be used - used by God and useful to those around us. We want to be needed.

Our church has 500 members. Every member is needed. If our church is not doing everything we should be doing it’s because we’re not utilizing all the human resources we have. We need all 500 members to tell others about Jesus, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to free the captives, and to let the oppressed go free. If each of us discovered the spiritual gift God has given us and started to do something that needs to get done, our church would be a power house. Our average attendance last year was 183 per Sunday. Like most Protestant churches, over 60% of our members are absent every week. Could it be that 60% of our members simply feel unneeded or perhaps even unwanted?

Last Saturday I asked the Deacons and Elders to fill out a questionnaire entitled, “Who Is Welcome In Our Congregation?” There were three questions: 1) What kind of people would you really like have join our church? 2) What kind of people might you like to have come to our church, depending on other factors? 3) What kind of people do you think would not receive a warm welcome in your church? Then there was a list of different kinds of people: A couple living together, not married. A gay couple. A couple with a crying baby who won’t leave it in the nursery. A person with a personal hygiene problem. An articulate, well educated, well dressed male or female. A lower income male or female. A teenage boy or girl who really likes contemporary music. A physically disabled person. A person whose smile reveals many missing teeth. A person with emotional problems. A female in a tight short skirt. A person with dirt under their finger nails and unkempt hair. How many of these people would we want coming to our church? How many would feel wanted and needed?

Tom Long was eating at a church covered dish supper. He sat next to a man - probably in his sixties. His face was leathery and weathered. His hands were callused. He had dirt under his finger nails. The friendly man turned to Dr. Long with a smile and said, "I've been going to this church all my life and I haven't understood a sermon for years. They just pass right over my head. I don't have the slightest idea what the preacher is trying to get across." That's a daunting comment to make to a guest preacher. So Dr. Long asked, "Why do you keep coming?" The man answered, "Every other Saturday, for years, I go with a group of men from the church to work on Habitat for Humanity houses. I really enjoy it. I enjoy the fellowship. I'm good at building houses. I feel like I'm really doing something important for Jesus. I stay here because I feel needed."

Many of our members, if asked to do something are glad to do it? Members who are never in church will gladly help for our annual CROP Walk. They help out in the kitchen. They help out at the annual Apple Festival. Members who aren't usually at the worship service will come if they're asked to be a Greeter or an Usher. Maybe they have it right. Maybe we need to make a concerted effort to ask people to help us, to let them know we need them. We need them in the choir, to greet people, to usher, to plant flowers in the Spring, to pull weeds in the summer, to teach Sunday School, to write letters, to visit a shut ins. We need them to help us worship God. We need them to share how their Christian faith has helped or hindered them in Sunday School and small groups. We need to convince all our members just how desperately needed they are.

Last week I visited a women who had part of her foot amputated. She was learning to walk again with the help of a nursing technician. I visited a man who had lost his eyesight. He needs somebody to be his eyes for him. Another woman needs a hearing aid. I was unable to communicate very well with her because her hearing aid battery went dead. She needs somebody to make sure her hearing aid has batteries. I feel badly for people who have lost their hearing or eyesight or ability to walk. But I feel far worse about people who have eyes but don't see people in need; who have ears but don't listen when a troubled person needs somebody, who

have feet and hands but don't use them to the glory of Christ, who have lips and a voice but never tell anybody about Jesus.

Tom Long was a guest minister at another church in a small town like Oxford. After the worship service he left the building with the minister. He noticed an older couple walking slowly down the street. They looked to be in their eighties. Each had an arm around the other like newly weds. The man had his lips close to the ear of the woman. Was he whispering or was he kissing her? The minister said, "Oh, that's Mr. and Mrs. Smith. They've been married over sixty years. She's blind as a bat. He's stone deaf. But they take a walk every day. He is her eyes. She is his ears. They need one another. They can't get along without one another.

We can't get along without one another. I need someone to help me right now. Would you please pick up the hymnal that's lying on the floor at put it in the pew rack, only I don't want you to use your legs, arms, or hands. Okay, use your legs, arms and hands but try doing it with your eyes closed. Somebody help her (him)? We need one another. We can't do the work of Christ all by ourselves.

Now everybody stand up and take the hand of the persons beside you. Some of us need to move if we're going to be united. Paul tells us that the Spirit of God unites all of us individual members into one body through baptism. "In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." When we're united by the Holy Spirit it means that one of us can be the eye and another the hand. One can be the mouth that speaks the message of Christ and the other can be the ear that listens to someone's problems. If we're united by the Spirit of God one can feel pain and all the rest will know it and do something to help. One can be happy and all the rest will share in that joy. We need one another. We can't do the work of Christ all by ourselves.

Let us pray: Eternal God,  
you have called us to be members of one body.  
Join us with those  
who in all times and places have praised your name,  
that, with one heart and mind,  
we may show the unity of your church,  
and bring honor to our Lord and Savior,  
Jesus Christ. Amen.