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John 15:1–11

10th Message

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FORMED THROUGH SERVING

SERIES: FORMED INTO CHRIST

Over the course of our summer series we have been reflecting on how we are “formed into Christ.” We have been taught that in Christ we are a new creation, formed by God in love. We are shaped through the word and prayer, through suffering and waiting, and through forgiving and loving.

As John so clearly laid out for us in his sermon last week, the heart of our purpose and calling, as a church and as individuals, is to love God and love others. How appropriate then, that today, Ministry Fair Sunday, we will reflect briefly on how we are formed through serving. We are formed and shaped as we put our love for God and others into action.

It is my hope and prayer that we all have eyes to see, ears to hear, and minds to understand that, as the Apostle John reminds us, all of it begins with and is motivated by God’s love.

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1 TNIV) “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.” (1 John 4:9). “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:11) “We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

God loves us so generously! And what is our response to that love? We abide in it, and we share it. The lavish love we receive is not for us to keep to ourselves, but to share freely and generously with others in acts of service. So important and foundational is this truth that God has tailor-made each service opportunity that lies before us. “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Eph 2:10).

Have you ever paused to reflect on that promise? If we take it in, it will change the way we wake up in the morning. Our days are not crowded with random and meaningless encounters, but instead are filled with divinely ordained opportunities to do good works! Occasions to serve are not to be seen as a troubling nuisance, but divine appointments set up uniquely for you to love and to serve.

It follows that what God has prepared in advance for you to do, he has also equipped you in advance to accomplish. As we heard in our scripture reading, the Apostle Peter said it well:

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If you speak, you should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If you serve, you should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 4:8–11)

It is easy to feel inadequate and to shrink back from entering into the good works that God has prepared for us. What good news then

that it is God’s strength, not ours, that we reply upon! His grace is sufficient for us, and his power is made perfect in weakness. When faced with an opportunity to serve, our proper response is not to try and muster up some kind of courage or false bravado, but to simply step out in faith and obedience into what God is already doing.

As we step into these good works, and use the gifts God has given us to love others, we find that we ourselves are transformed in the process. I can think of at least four ways we are formed through serving:

1. We grow in our faith and dependence upon the Lord using us for his glory.
2. We strengthen and sharpen our spiritual gifts as we put them into action.
3. We learn to humble ourselves as we place the needs of others first.
4. We build relationships and grow in our understanding of and compassion for those who are different than us.

I’m sure you can think of many more ways that we are transformed through serving.

It has been a great joy for me to see the various ways you have served others over the years. You are an inspiration to me—how you have deeply loved your families, your friends, neighbors, co-workers and strangers in both word and deed.

It is also true that many of you have come to me looking for ways to exercise your gifts in loving our neighbors within our broader community. In an effort to help you use your gifts in loving service, I would like to draw your attention to three things.

First, on our PBCC website you will see a “Serving” tab that details a variety of ways for you to love others at PBCC, locally, and globally. There is a lot of information and many opportunities at your fingertips.

Second, I will be offering a class this Fall entitled “Compassion In Action.” We will explore more deeply what it means and looks like to love one another, and we will spend a good deal of time helping you discover how God has uniquely shaped you to serve.

Third, I am excited to announce that in an effort to encourage an ongoing lifestyle of loving service and to expose you to a variety of local service opportunities we will have a SERVICE SUNDAY on Sunday, April 26, 2015. We will set aside the morning to worship and glorify the Lord through our acts of loving, compassionate, and helpful service.

We have not made final decisions on the exact timeline of the day, but the flow of the morning might go something like this:

8:30 am: Gather in the Sanctuary for worship, prayer, and a brief message.

9:00 am: Head out to project locations to serve (*some projects may be done at PBCC*)

12:30pm: Projects wrap up (*some projects may have slightly different schedules*)

Our desire is to have a great variety of projects so that folks of all ages and abilities can participate. We already have a handful of projects lined-up, but we need many more. Sign-ups for our SERVICE SUNDAY projects will begin March 1st, but we are accepting Project Proposals and Project Leaders right now. If you would like to get a Project Leader information packet, or simply have a few questions, please contact me at andy@pbcc.org.

We must keep this close to our heart and the forefront of our mind: that we serve one another, we love one another deeply, not out of guilt or coercion, but because God first loved us. Because of that love we are able to serve with great freedom and joy.

What you see outside is an expression of love—God’s love for us, our love for Him, and our love for one another. As you walk around the Ministry Fair, I want you to see that it is more than just opportunities to serve, and I’d like to invite and encourage you to respond in a few different ways. As you walk around and engage folks at the various ministry tables, rejoice at how God is at work. Our church, with the great variety of people and gifts, is a beautiful tapestry of God’s handiwork. What an amazing God we worship! So rejoice and give thanks for his good work in so many ways and in so many people.

Each of the ministries you see outside, is an opportunity to place yourself into a community and connect with others in the body of Christ. There is a place for you here. If you are not currently involved in a home fellowship group I strongly urge you to make your first stop our Home Fellowships table where you can sign-up to join a small group that gathers together for study, reflection, worship, and prayer.

The beauty of a healthy, vibrant, connected Christian community is that your life affects my life, and my life impacts your life, and together we tell the story of God’s work of redemption in a way that we could not express alone.

Finally, I invite us to pray. Pray for God’s ongoing work among us, in us and through us. Let’s pray for those who are reached by our different ministries. Pray for those who are actively involved. Pray for yourself as you reflect on ways the Lord might be prompting you to serve.

Lord, as we move around the tables and talk with various individuals may we get a sense of the story being told by you in and through our congregation. May we find a deep sense of joy and purpose in the way you are inviting each and every one of us to express your truth and your love in our family, our church, our community, and in our world. Amen.

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