

Sermon for Sunday, September 26, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"THE PIRATE AND YOUR HIDDEN TREASURE"

Romans 12:1-11

Text: "Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others."
Romans 12:4, 5

In our scripture for this morning St. Paul says that we are not to think too much of ourselves. He says, "I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think." One would think that the next statement would be to admonish us to think lowly of one's self. Yet, surprisingly enough, that is not what St. Paul says. In the RSV, the translator writes, "but think of yourself with sober judgment." Doesn't that sort of surprise you? The paraphrase that I read this morning is actually a more accurate translation of the meaning of the Greek. There we read, "be honest in your estimate of yourselves..." And then St. Paul goes on to say that every one of us is a member of the body of Christ. He says that not all of us have the same function--and note this--and then he says that at the same time, all of us do have a function. He puts it this way, "having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them..."

Now, that means quite simply that if you are a Christian, God has given you a gift. Different ones of us have different gifts, but the fact is, no one is without some gift--nobody is useless to God--nobody is without some function. So, every Christian has a gift. God doesn't mean for any of us to be useless. Each of us has a treasure in our lives--the gift of God that makes us useful to His kingdom. And the question I want to ask this morning is this: Where is your treasure? Where is your gift? What has God given you?

St. Paul doesn't say, "if you have a gift..", he doesn't say, "when you get a gift..". No, he says, "having gifts..." So then, it is not inappropriate to ask, "where is your gift this morning." Has some spiritual pirate stolen your treasure and buried it on some lost island this morning? If you feel you have no spiritual gift this morning--if you feel you have no contribution to make to God's kingdom this morning--I would like to make two suggestions to you. First, every Christian does have a gift. He has a role to play, a part to play--he has a function, a usefulness to the body. And while we may not all have the same gifts--as St. Paul makes clear--every believer has a gift, as St. Paul says--according to the grace given to us. The second thing I want to say is this: If your treasure from God, if your gift from the Lord has been stolen and buried--then the pirate is you! No one has stolen your gift this morning; no one has taken your treasure. No, if you have no treasure from God today it is because you yourself have buried it. And in that context I want to call your attention again to our text this morning: "be honest in your estimate of yourselves..."

Do you know why most of us bury our spiritual treasure--the gifts God gives us? It is because we do not make an honest estimate of ourselves. Most of us are familiar with people who make a dishonest estimate of themselves by over-estimating their abilities. Most of us know egotistical people who think far too highly of themselves. Most of us know self-centered persons who think only of themselves, who put themselves at the center of everything as though the world revolved around them. And that is dishonest because it is an over-estimate of their importance. But did it occur to

you that it was just as dishonest to think too little of yourself? Isn't it just as dishonest to think you are of no importance, no significance and that you have nothing to offer the world?

I would like to offer some suggestions this morning for dealing with the pirates in our lives--the pirates that cause us to make a dishonest estimate of ourselves. Reader's Digest carried an article recently about the book Gone With the Wind. The author, Margaret Mitchell, began the novel in 1926 and spent four years working on it. Yet, for five years after its completion the manuscript lay collecting dust and yellowing with age. And why? For the simple reason that Margaret Mitchell lacked assurance. She did not believe that anyone would be interested in what she had written and once denied to a publisher that she even had a novel. A dishonest pirate within her own heart was stealing her treasure. How can we deal with these pirates in our own lives?

The first thing I would have you notice is this: You are priceless. A lot of us this morning don't think very much of ourselves. We have a low estimate of our worth. One of the most common problems I deal with in counseling is a low self-image. So many of us don't even like ourselves. Perhaps more than anyone else we know what we are like on the inside, we know what fears we have, what sins we have, what failures are ours--and we don't think much of our own worth.

But Jesus thinks we are priceless. Once he spoke of two sparrows being sold for a penny, and yet even a lowly sparrow could not fall to the ground without God. "You are worth more than many sparrows," said Jesus. And then another time he told a story about a shepherd who had lost one of his sheep. And the shepherd left the ninety and nine sheep and went in search of his little lost lamb. Jesus said that's how God feels about us. Every soul is of infinite value to God, so much so that he sent his very own son to die for each of us. Yes, whoever you are this morning, you are priceless to God.

You see, once you look the son of God fully in the face--once you see his love for you and understand that his cross was for you--you can never think lowly of yourself again.

The second thing I would have you notice is this: God has a purpose for you. Have you ever been in a group of very talented people and as you listen to them you begin to feel like an idiot with two left feet? When you are thrown with people who can do many things and do them well you begin to feel very inadequate. The other Sunday I preached on the parable of the servants whose master entrusted some of his goods to them. One received five talents, another two and the third only received one talent. And how do you think he felt as he stood there watching those others being entrusted with so much and his master giving him so little? Is it any wonder he felt inadequate and useless? Is it any wonder he went off and buried his talent?

But didn't this servant make the same mistake we do? We look at the abilities and gifts that others have and by comparison we have so little. But God doesn't want us to compare the gifts he has given someone else to do the job he has given them to do! No, he wants us to do the job he has given us to do--and he gives us what we need to do it. The master gave the third servant a one-talent job to do and he gave him one talent to do it with. And the reason he failed was because he was looking at the five-talent man and the five-talent job and saying to himself, "boy, I can't do that with one talent." So, he ended up failing to do even the one talent job he could have done. Do you ever do that? See how it works. Suppose you are asked to speak

to a group of people about a spiritual subject. You say, "Well, I'm not Billy Graham" or you say, "Well, I've never been to seminary." And you end up not doing it--saying no--because you were looking at somebody with five talents and never got around to using the one you had.

God never asked you to compare the talents or gifts he gave you to what he gave somebody else. Rather, he asks you to compare your gifts to the job he asks you to do. When you do that, you will discover your ability matches what God asks you to do. Isn't that what our text this morning means when it says, "for we each have different work to do..."

Some people get big, exciting jobs to do. Some get work to do that makes headlines or brings fame. But most of us don't. Most of us are given very ordinary tasks--being a faithful mother, a supportive wife, a breadwinner for a family, a devoted father. My duty may be to take care of an aged parent, to care for someone sick, or simply to be loving to others. But life has meaning--it has purpose--because that is the work God calls me to do. And when I find God's purpose for me I always discover he has given me the ability--the gifts--to do it. And when I discover that, no pirate can take that treasure from me.

The third thing I would have you notice is this: We each have a place. Every one of us has a place in God's kingdom. We belong. Our text this morning says, "We are all parts of it..." It says, "we belong to each other, and each needs all the others." There is a lot of loneliness in the world today--from young people who are struggling with feelings of insecurity to old people who find themselves unneeded and alone. A Christian psychologist recently wrote, "I am convinced that senility and mental deterioration at the end of life often result from the growing awareness by the aged that they live in the exclusive world of the young, where wrinkles, backaches and dentures are matters of scorn; where their ideas are out-of-date and their continued existence is a burden." Yes, there is a lot of loneliness--a lot of alienation--a host of isolation in the hearts of all of us. Many of us are somewhat like the lady to whom the real estate agent was trying to sell a house. "Why do I need a house?" she asked, "I was born in a hospital, educated in a school, courted in an automobile, married in a church. I live out of the delicatessen. I spend my mornings on the golf course, my afternoons at the bridge table and my evenings at the movies. When I die they will bury me at the undertakers. Man, all I need is a garage."

Well, we may laugh at that, but the fact is many of us keep ourselves just as busy because if we stop the loneliness will close in on us. But the Bible says we are all parts of Christ's body. The Bible says it takes all of us to make it complete. The Bible says we belong to each other and each of us is needed. That means you have a place where you belong for you are a part of the family of God, you are the child of a king. And when we know that, we have a fresh understanding of what Jesus meant when he said, "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there you may be also..."

Many of us this morning are not living up to our spiritual potential. We are living defeated lives for we seem to have no gifts from God. If some spiritual pirate has stolen your treasure, you will find it buried in your own heart. And you will find the map to that treasure in our scripture for this morning for you are priceless to God, you have a purpose in life and you have a place where you belong. Yes, be honest in your estimate of yourself. You see, you are a child of God.