

WPC
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Be The Church: Marks of Membership
Romans 12

This is the third in a series of sermons called “Being the Church.” As I’ve noted before, this series is functioning as our Inquirers’ Class this year – at its conclusion, those of you who would like to join Wallingford Presbyterian Church are invited to do so. But in the meantime, for those of you who are already members, it’s been a chance to refresh your knowledge of what it means to be a member of Christ’s church and why it’s important. I’ve designed this sermon series just as much for you as for nonmembers.

We started this series by stating that the foundation of the church is faith in the resurrected Jesus Christ. To be a part of the church first and foremost is not to be a part of an institution; it’s to profess one’s faith that Christ is Lord and Savior. And when we do that we become a part of Christ’s family, part of his body.

We then put some walls on the foundation: to be a part of Christ’s body is to be a part of the local church. We saw in the book of Acts that the first believers could not do faith on their own. We need a group of believers

to call our family, a place where we can recharge our spiritual batteries every week.

This morning, I'd like for us to consider how to put our unique imprint on the church by using the gifts and skills that God has given us. In the Presbyterian Church, we call these the *Marks of Membership*. There are nine marks listed in our Book of Order. Going through all nine marks would take several more sermons, so I wanted to focus today on the fact that we all grow into discipleship. It takes time. But the important thing to remember is that *everyone* has something to contribute in the body of Christ.

I want to show you a video that makes that same point.

[SHOW VIDEO about Johnny the bagger:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOZPlt3Ha0Y>]

The community that Johnny lived in started to change because this one man decided he had something special within him that he would share with others.

What is our response to God's action in our lives, to this good news? Paul says we're called to be living sacrifices. That may sound scary at first – aren't sacrifices usually dead? But Jesus Christ has already died on our behalf, once and for all; there's no more need for dead sacrifices. God wants us to place our lives before him, so that we won't be conformed to outside

forces but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This is the most life-giving thing we can do: sacrifice to the God who created us, who sacrificed for us first, and who desires the best for us. How do we do that? By using our lives and gifts for God.

Sometimes it's good for all of us to be reminded of what it means to be part of the church family. What are the types of gifts we can offer? Let me highlight one of the Marks of Membership: supporting the work of the church through the giving of our talents, our treasures, and our time.

First, giving of our talents. We have such a talented group of people in this church. The things you can do I certainly can't do. Johnny the bagger had the gift of encouragement. Maybe you have the gift of prayer, or the gift of service, or the gift of teaching. The church can use all of those gifts. Everyone's gifts, no matter who you are or what your age, can be used to build up the body of Christ.

Secondly, our treasures, which is a theme that's talked about all over the Scriptures. We can support the church by sharing our money. All of our treasures are not ours to begin with anyway – they're a gift from God. Scripture gives us a really good rule of thumb for sharing our treasure: a tithe, giving 10%. It may take time to build up to that amount, but it's a good goal to shoot for. Giving a percentage of our income means that we

prioritize God in our lives. And for those of us who do give the first fruits of our labor, we discover that God is faithful and that we are blessed.

Finally, we can give the gift of our time. That means when we volunteer for things like Sunday School, youth group, and coffee hour, we're engaged in holy work. Everyone has 24 hours every day, and how we prioritize our time says a great deal about our relationship with God. We can't build a strong relationship with our families or friends if we don't spend any time with them. Likewise, we can only grow in grace by consistently and continually spending quality time with God and God's people in the church.

John Wesley once said, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can." May God give us all the grace to use the gifts of time, talent, and treasure wisely. Amen.