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PLUGGING INTO PRESTONWOOD

Expressing Compassionate Ministry

Acts 2:42-47

1 Corinthians 12:12

September 10, 2006 - Sunday 11:00 AM - David H. McKinley

[Dr. McKinley, message, Expressing Compassionate Ministry]

We stand on the Book and that what we do is based on a bedrock of biblical conviction. We're not just about spiritual impressionism where people just come and get an impression. We want to be expressionists where we are expressing the Word of God in life; being doers of the word and not hearers only. And so today I come to address the third major element of PLUGGING INTO PRESTONWOOD and that's what we call "Expressing Compassionate Ministry... Expressing Compassionate Ministry." Because who we are and what we are about is not just about us and this big environment called the church house; it's about what we are as we go out of this place and expressing the love of Christ in our community. And each of these elements that I've mentioned to you and summarized for you are given to us in a summary picture that we find in the book of Acts chapter 2.

And so I want you to go with me this morning to the book of Acts because there we see the primary... the early... the first impression of the early church. And here I want us to read once again this passage that we've been looking at and I want us to embrace together something afresh and anew about what it means to fulfill God's call to compassionate ministry in and through our lives. Acts 2, beginning at verse 42:

42) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. 43) And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44) And all who believed...

Let's just pause a moment, verse 44. Want to be sure you're there:

44) And all who believed were... (What's the next word?) together, and they had all things in (What?) common. 45) And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

There was this visible expression of love, of community. They were a plugged in community; to one another and to the peoples' needs beyond them. And the reason we know that is the Bible says in verse 47:

47) They were praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to the church... to the number of the church day by day those who were being saved.

So great, so significant was the heart of the early church and the expression of its ministry that the Bible says that people saw them caring for one another... this process of distribution that was going on.

You know we live in a world that's all caught up in consolidation. It's what you consume, it's what you can amass, it's what you can consolidate... put your name on, call your own! But in the church of Christ it's all about distribution. It's about what God has given you to use for the well-being of others and learning how to distribute to one another's needs. And so great was this process of distribution going on in the early church that the Bible says people every day said, "I want to be a part of this. I need to experience this. There's something different about you." And the early church in Acts 2 was expressing compassionate ministry and the impact of that ministry changed people all around them, even as it changed their very lives.

And I believe that if I could simply summarize verses 44 and 45 from Acts 2 and bring from that a simply statement that I want to present to you today it would be this: That the church exists to express the compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ and to make His love and grace known... that is, visible to people all around. Let me say that one more time. The church exists to express the compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ to make His love and grace known to people all around. Can I get an Amen? [Amen] That's what we're about! We want people to see Christ and believe Christ because of what they see in us and what they experience when they get near us.

I've told you this story before but I believe it bears repeating. That during the Second World War through a series of bombings that took place between Germany and England, that there was a beautiful cathedral in England that was bombed and was ravaged through the destruction. After the war was over people came together to try to preserve what they could of this beautiful architectural facility... all of the beauty of it and... and the placement of it in the community. And they started rebuilding... reassembling this building out of the rubble and the rubbish of the war. It seems that the centerpiece of the entire cathedral was a statue of Jesus Christ that was simply the full body of Christ standing and He had, as though it were, His hands extended like this. And for so many years in that cathedral there was a sign... it was the words of Jesus under that statue and it said this: Come unto Me.

Now that should be true of every church. The purpose of the church is to tell people come to Jesus. That's what we're about. But as they put the building back together, as they tried to reassemble the statue, a group of medical students had made that their specific project and they were able to carefully and skillfully bring it all back together, everything but one part. The hands that had been so beautifully fashioned in a part of that

statue had absolutely been destroyed. There weren't even pieces that could be put together; it was just dust. And they were found with a dilemma... they had a complete statue, they had no hands. And someone came up with the idea and said this, Maybe we need to change the message of the statue. And so do you know what they made the message? "He has no hands but our hands." It went from being a statue that said come as a statue that said to the church, go. He has no hands but our hands.

And today I want you to see and to understand with me that the ministry of Christ, the compassion of Christ is to be extended through the church of God in this day, in this hour and in this community through a people called Prestonwood as we discover what it means to be His hands. So I want to give you some insights today about expressing compassionate ministry and I want to give you one insight for every finger on your hand, to help you to remember how we can be the heart of God and the hands of Christ in this day.

Now what has been given to us as a summary in Acts chapter 2 is actually given to us in instruction as a strategy... as a picture in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. So you've read one picture of the church in Acts 2. You see that this is a functioning community, working together. But now we want to go and look at the strategy... the structure of how God's made the church and how He wants us to function in ministry together. So go from Acts chapter 2 over to 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and as you're turning there, I want to make the first of the observations that are important for us to see and understand this morning, and that is this: That we are all called to express compassionate ministry. We are called to express compassionate ministry! We see it in Acts but it is very specific in 1 Corinthians that God has called each and every one of us to fulfill a function together in Christ. Let's read together 1 Corinthians 12, verse 12:

12) For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

Just look at your body! Your body has a lot of different members but they're all part of one body. Well the Bible says that's how it is with Christ. And every member of the body is called to perform the ministry of that body together. Every person is called.

Now I know most of the time when we talk about a calling, we talk about those of us who are in the ministry, and I am here today because I absolutely personally believe that the call of God is on my life to do what I'm doing to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And there is a specific sense of a call to a work for ministry. But there's also a sense in which every member of the body of Christ is brought together and placed in the body to fulfill a calling! And sometimes as we distinguish between clergy and laity, ministers and members, we fail to emphasize sufficiently that every member is called!

There was a little girl in a Bible study class. They were talking about ministers and members, clergy and laity. And they asked her to describe the difference. And she said, Well, the clergy... the ministers... they're paid for being good.[laughter] She said, But the laity... the members, they're just good for nothing. Ha! [laughter] Well, that is not true.

I understand what the little girl was trying to differentiate but I want you to know that there is something we absolutely believe at Prestonwood and it is this: Every member is a minister. Every member of this church is a minister! Because all of us have been called together to express the compassionate ministry of Christ. We are a part of the body of Christ by placement, sovereignly when we are saved. But we are a part of this local community... this local body that gives expression to Christ here in this place and beyond. And we are all called to a compassionate ministry. You are a called man! You are a called woman! And I want to encourage you to say Yes, Lord, I answer the call.

But there's a second insight that I want you to see today and that is not only that we are all called to compassionate ministry... God has a planned placement of service for each of us, but our ministry is enabled through diversity. The ministry that God has called you to, God has enabled you to do and me to do through diversity! He has given us and made us different in order that He might make us one in effectiveness and in impact. Now how does God make us diverse and what is the diversity that God has enabled to accomplish ministry? Well, there's several elements that make up that diversity.

And the first is your spiritual gift. You when you receive Christ, receive a gift called the gift of eternal life. In fact, the Bible says that to receive Christ is to receive that gift. You are signed, sealed and delivered. When you receive Christ you're headed to heaven because God has saved you and He's given you the gift of eternal life.

But not only has God given you the gift of eternal life, he has given you a spiritual gift; a unique capacity, a unique enablement to be able to minister to others. Let me just define it and put it on the screen for you. A spiritual gift is an ~~enab~~... an ability or enablement through which the Holy Spirit ministers through you to people around you.

This same passage 1 Corinthians 12, verse 7 says it this way:

7) To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

God has made each of us different for the good of all of us. And God has designed that ministry would be accomplished through diversity. Now the matter of spiritual gifts is a major subject in and of itself. It could be at the source of a multi-week study. But let me just quickly summarize for you some things the Bible tells us about gifts. There are three primary passages that talk to us about spiritual gifts. First, the book of Romans

chapter 12; second, this passage we're in, 1 Corinthians chapter 12; and third, the book of Ephesians chapter 4.

In Romans 12 we read and we study about the service gifts that God has given to the body. Service gifts... the gift of teaching, the gift of mercy, the gift of administration, the gift of giving... All of these are gifts that God has given to serve and service the body of Christ together and to give expression to who we are through our mutual belonging.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 we read about a group of gifts called the sign gifts. And a lot of times when you get to talking about spiritual gifts people go to seed on the sign gifts. These are the gifts of healing, of miracles, of tongues and they're gifts that the Bible makes clear were given to the apostles and to the first century church as a visible expression of the power of God in ministry. The very issue that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 12 is the fact that there was a lot of confusion over these gifts that the people in Corinth had begun to magnify the signs and the experiences. But they were not manifesting the service and the support gifts. And so many times people get confused and that becomes an issue. But that is a portion of the spiritual gifts that are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12.

Then in Ephesians chapter 4 we read about gifts that I would call support gifts. These are the gifts of leadership, the specific called gifts that God has given for the church; pastors and teachers and evangelists.

And so we have all these different categories of gifts. My question to you today is: Do you know that you have a spiritual gift? Do you know what your gift is? And most importantly, are you using your gift? You see, God wants us to discover, to develop and to deploy our gifts in ministry. And so much of what you see behind the scenes at Prestonwood is nothing more and nothing less than people who are employing and using their gifts for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Now a gift is not a talent. Talent can be seen in singing. Many people have a talent to sing. Other people have a talent to bake, to cook... to do those kinds of things. And God uses our talents but specifically He has enabled us through our gifts.

There are three other ways that God has and uses diversity in our lives in order to benefit the body and that is not only our gifts, but what I would call our gravities... gravities. Now you do understand that the law of gravity is always in effect, right? If I hold this Bible up and I release it, you know what's gonna happen, right? [noise] It's gonna fall. Why? Because of the law of gravity. It's pulled [tap] down; it's pulled [tap] toward the desk because of gravity. Well, just as we see the law of gravity in the physical world there's a gravity spiritually that God has given to you. It's your spiritual passion. He's given you a gift, but God has also given you a passion. God has given you a pull towards ~~eer~~... certain things that move your heart and touch your life and connect with you, and cause

you to connect with others. And so God uses not only our gifts spiritually but He uses the gravities of motivations and desires and inclinations that are purified by the Holy Spirit and that are used to compel us in ministry.

Then God uses our gears... our gears. You do know that people around you... some of them are geared differently than you are, right? In fact we spend a lot of time in life trying to help other people shift gears, right? That's what we want to do in our families. That kid is just wired in a strange way. They got a different gear and we want to shift the gear and get them in the right gear with everybody else, right? You see, we struggle sometimes because of our gears.

Some of us are talkers like Peter; whatever comes in our mind, comes out our mouth. Others of us are doers; driven like Paul. Paul was a man who... Just get out of my way and just do it. He didn't want to talk about it; he just wanted to do it! That's how Paul was. Moses was a feeler. He was a man who had feelings and had sensitivities and responded to the needs of others. And Abraham was a thinker who would think through things and process things.

You see, God has given us different gears and God uses our spiritual gifts that He places in us; He gives and uses the gravities that are motivating us and moving us; and then God uses even the different gears that you have, your personality, for His glory.

And then there... there's one final thing that He uses and that is He uses our grieves. I don't know what you've walked through. I know that behind each face there's a story in this room today. And some of you have made journeys in life that are unbearable to even think about. What you've experienced in a relationship, what you've experienced in a sickness, what you've experienced in some aspect of life has very much imprinted your life and made you who you are today. But you're sitting here today because of grace; because the God that we sang about a moment ago who has no orphans and no outcasts has through His grace ministered to you. And it's interesting to note that the Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 3 that:

3) The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of all comforts,

And He comforts us that we might be able to comfort others. Even our sorrows, even our struggles, even our injuries become a part of the plan that God puts together to use the diversity of our lives to minister to His body.

So principle number 1, we are all called to compassionate ministry. Principle number 2, God enables that ministry through our diversity. Principle number 3, Our diversity is designed for unity.

God has made us different that He might bring us together and make us one. And though God has made us diverse, it's not so that we will be in tension

and that we will be schizophrenic, but so that we will be able to come together and to work together for the benefit and the maximum benefit of everyone else in the body. He makes us different to make us one. And diversity is not a bad thing in the church; diversity is a good thing. But the way that God designed our diversity is that it all fits together in unity.

Now when we talk about unity, we need to do some clarification. Because I find that people have all kinds of different concepts about what unity is. People always like to talk about unity. We need unity... unity. But what do we mean when we say unity?

Well, first and foremost, unity is not unison. We sang some music earlier today and some of the time that we were singing, we were singing in unison. The choir, the praise team and the congregation were all singing the same. But there were moments in music this morning where we moved from unison to harmony, where we moved into parts and the sopranos went way up here and the basses went way down here. And in the process there was this blend. It was unified, but it wasn't unison. And when we say unity we're not talking about being in unison.

Nor are we talking about uniformity. Uniformity is when everybody looks alike, walks alike, talks alike, dresses alike. And there are churches that exist to create uniformity. They want a whole group of people who are little c... cookie-cutter Christians, all looking, walking, talking and acting just alike. We don't want that at all! Because we don't believe that unity is uniformity. God made the diversity for distinctiveness.

Nor is unity union. You can be members of the same church, you can be members of the same family, you may have a union, but you may not have unity. I was reminded of that this week when my friend Chuck Rankin sent me a little love story. I've brought the picture of this wonderful couple to let you see. [laughter] This dear lady is 80 years of age and she was recently arrested for shoplifting. And when she stood before the judge in Cincinnati, Ohio he asked her what she had stolen. And she simply said a can of peaches. And he said, why in the world did you steal a can of peaches? She said, it's simple; I was hungry. He said, well, he said, how many peaches are in a can? She said, 6. He said, well, I think the only reasonable thing to do is to give you 1 day in jail for every peach in that can. And so he said, I'm going to give you 6 days in jail. And just about the time he was going to drop the gavel and settle the sentence, the husband... that wonderful man sitting there next to her... spoke up and said, Judge, could I ask a question? He said, Yessir, you may. He said, actually, I just want to make a comment. He said, Okay, what is it? He said, she also stole a can of peas. [extended laughter]

You see, you can have unity... ah... you can have a union and not have unity! They had union. They had had a union for a long time, but they didn't have unity! Unity is when we understand that there is diversity but it's brought together for the common good. And therefore, every one of us is to connect

with, to appreciate, and to understand the value of all the members. We are to honor God’s diversity and we are to protect the unity.

Years ago when I was a teenager my pastor, Dr. Adrian Rogers preached a message on the body of Christ and wanted to leave a lasting imprint, and he did. He did in my mind and in my heart because he took us all out one Sunday on the parking lot. There was an outline of the body of Christ and everybody got inside the body. Well, there’s the picture. And this was his little phrase: Everybody [clap] is somebody [clap] and Jesus [clap] Christ is Lord. That’s what the church is. [applause] The church is a place where everybody is somebody and where Jesus Christ is Lord. By the way, I’m up there near that left arm, right up there. I don’t know if you can see. [laughter] But you know, I’ve never forgotten because it made an impression on me that we are all a part of this body and we are to honor the diversity and we are to understand the importance of the unity.

That brings me to the fourth insight this morning and that is that our unity is maintained through maturity... our unity is maintained through maturity. We’re called to ministry. Ministry is enabled through diversity. Diversity is designed for unity. But our unity is maintained through maturity.

You know why so many churches do not function effectively? Because they are not growing up in faith. They are not becoming more mature. Oh, they’re trying to do ministry [clap]. They’re trying and they’re pulling at their diversity, but they don’t understand the importance of balancing unity and diversity through a faith that is growing in maturity. Listen again to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, beginning in verse 14:

14) For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15) If the foot should say, “Because I’m not the hand, I don’t belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16) And if the ear should say, “Because I’m not the eye, I don’t belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17) And if the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? And if the whole body were the ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18) But as it is, God arranged each of the members of the body... each one of them as He has chosen.

You see God has chosen a place for you, and God has chosen a place for me and in maturity we learn to appreciate one another and to work together. That’s why we need maturity.

Without maturity a body is impacted by jealousy and envy and strife. Just think about it. What if my hand all the sudden said to me today, I’m not going to do anything else. I’m tired of the fact that the face and the eyes are getting all the attention this morning! I’m not doing anything else! That’s it! I’m done! I mean, who cares if I’m even here. Nobody even knows about me! They don’t want to see me; they just want to see the face and the eyes. That’s all they are ever interested in. And look how little hair he’s got anyway, huh? [laughter] I mean, the next thing you know, you know, one

member of the body is fighting against the other because there's no maturity.

But the Bible says that a part of maturity is growing and learning that we are valued and we are placed together for purpose; and therefore, we guard the unity with a spirit of maturity... of growing up in Christ. And I need to understand that the way God has made you, He's made you for His glory and you need to understand that about me.

Now that's certainly true of my human body. Every part of my human body was designed to accomplish a specific function. And there's not any part of this body that's not important. Now it doesn't all have equal visibility, thank God, but at the same time it has equal importance. I don't know when the last time was you thought about your little toe, but I can tell you, if you ran into a chair in the middle of the night, it gets all the attention, right? [laughter] And it's not important because it's my little toe; it's important because it's a part of the body. And God has designed the body to function best.

Now God has given me my hands. My hands are extended out from my body and given me fingers that they might be able to reach out and to work together, to coordinate and to help me bring things to my body. But just think about this... a little creative imagination. What if God had made my finger and put my eye on my fingertip? Now have you ever thought about that? I know that seems bizarre, but think about it. You could see people coming up behind you and you'd never have to turn your head. [extended laughter] Think about this, ladies. You'd love this: you could be in church and your child or your husband (kinda one and the same)[laughter] could reach over and say to you, do you have a pen? Do you have a mint? Do you have this... And you could just open your purse and look in there the whole time I was talking and you'd never even have to, you know. Think about it, guys. You could count the money in your pocket when your kids come up and know which bill you wanted to give them before you pulled it out. [laughter] But every time you got ready to get on an elevator, you'd stick yourself in the eye! It'd be awful! [laughter] Just think about the impact of that!

No, you see, my eye is placed at the top of my head, at the highest level possible. It's protected by a bone structure. And my hands are able to reach out and to be used as appendages and as members that work together. But the finger can't say to the eye, you're not important. The eye can't say to the finger, you're not important. The finger can't say to the toe, you don't matter. You see, every part of the body matters and it's when some member of the body that does not function that we all become aware.

I mean, have you ever broken a limb? Have you ever been on an airplane and had your ears stop up? I mean, suddenly you can't think of anything but the pain and of the fact that your ear isn't working rightly. And I'm afraid far too many churches get focused just on all the things that aren't working instead of working together to minister to one another and to minister for the glory of Christ.

Well, that brings me to my fifth and my final point, and let me just be sure you've got all five this morning. Okay, you ready? We talked about the hand... here it is. We are called to compassionate ministry; our ministry is enabled through diversity; our diversity is designed for unity; our unity is maintained through maturity... here's number 5; maturity is focused on God's glory.

Don't ever get the idea that when I talk about maturity, I'm talking about, you know, one Christian weighing himself or herself against another. When we talk about maturity, we're not talking about fat Christians; we're talking about a glorious Savior. We're talking about lifting Christ up. And just as in the first century in the first church when the body was functioning the way it was made to function, there were people being added to the church daily! People came to Jesus! So it is that the maturity that grows us up together is to give glory and honor and worship to Jesus Christ. It's all about Him; it's all about His glory.

Ephesians chapter 4 tells this: The Bible says that the support gifts that God has given to pastors and teachers and leaders in the church are for the

For the building up of the body of Christ to the full stature of the measure of the fullness of God.

We're all about Jesus! That's why we exist! That's what we do! That's how we live! And everything we are and everything we do is to remember that we exist for His glory.

You're well aware of the fact that we stand today at the doorway of the fifth year anniversary of 9/11. And while we all remember where we were and what we were doing and who was with us at that moment on that very fateful day when we realized the incredible human tragedy that had occurred, something you may not be aware of is that just after 9/11 of 2001, the governor of New York, Governor Pataki... George Pataki wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, Gordon England, and he asked that the Navy bestow the name USS New York on a new surface warship. Typically the states are used to name submarines. But in this case Governor Pataki made a specific petition saying would you name a new warship the USS New York? Permission was granted in August of 2002 and on September 9 of 2003 (just a few years ago) 24 tons of steel that came from the rubble of the World Trade Center were melted and poured to form the stem of this new battleship that would be commissioned with one primary purpose: to take itself to the war on terror. And out of all of the horror and all of the tragedy, a ship was formed and will one day be deployed to go out and to do battle to defend the memory of those whose lives were lost. You know what the motto of the ship is? *“Never Forget!”* Through all the tragedy, through the blending and the loss of all the lives, there is an engagement in the war.

And I share that with you this morning to say that in much the same way God does that through His church. He never wants us to forget what Christ did

for us on the cross; how He suffered, how He bled, how He died. And yet through the suffering of Jesus all of our failures, all of our sins, all of our stains are melted down and brought together by grace. And God forms in us a body of Christ that takes the message of Christ into a world that needs to hear that hope and that truth. That's the reason that on the first year anniversary of the tragedy of 2001... 2002 September 11th on a Wednesday evening Prestonwood church gathered 10,000 strong and stood on the front lawn and put the cross on that prayer tower out there to say that we exist under the cross to call people everywhere to Jesus Christ! Because they need the life, they need the hope, they need the love that Christ and Christ alone can give. And that's who we are and that's what we're about in the body of Christ. It's all about Him and it's all about His glory!

Our lives are melted by grace. Our lives are fused in His love but our lives are lived for His glory. And today I want to challenge you to join me and say yes we will express the compassion of Christ through the ministry of this church. Amen? [Amen.]

I want you to stand with me. I do want to ask that no one be leaving because we're only going to be in here for another moment but this moment may be the most important moment of this entire morning. Because we're going to close this service this morning inviting people first and foremost to connect with Jesus Christ. I don't know who you are and I don't know what your need is, but I believe with all of my heart that the Holy Spirit has spoken to hearts and lives today, and there are men and women, boys and girls here today who need Jesus. And today I want you to know that He loves you and no matter what you have experienced and how deeply you've been hurt, Jesus can take you, love you, heal you, change you, if you'll just give your life to Him.

Others of you need to plug into Prestonwood today. [music begins] Yes, you come; you attend this church, that church, but you need to get plugged in, you need to get connected and you need to be purposeful and intentional about living out your calling and using your gifts for Christ. And today I want to ask you not to delay any longer. I want to ask you today to respond and say yes, I want to make this my church home. I want to be a part of this church, this ministry.

If you're there in the balcony, we have a minister who standing right there at the balcony, at the edge of the balcony. If you're in the lower section, they're right behind you. If you're in the upper section, they're just there in front of you. But they're there. You don't have to come down here. You just go to one of those men. They're going to take a moment, talk with you, give you some information, help you to take the next step in your life.

What's going on there will also happen here. Our ministers are here. They're going to stand at the head of each aisle. And whether you're there in the terrace or here on the lower floor. Maybe you're in the middle of an aisle. You didn't even come thinking you'd make a decision. All you need to

do is just say excuse me. If you will just take one step I promise you Jesus will meet you. This could be the most defining day of your life. So I plead with you in the name of Jesus. Don't just live your life for yourself. Live for Him and something that matters. And your life will never matter until you live for Jesus.

And then for those of you who know Him, don't be content to just come and take, to consolidate and absorb; become a part of the distribution system of this ministry and make a difference for Christ.

Father, thank You for moving and working through your Spirit. Thank You, Lord, for Your Word. Thank You for the picture You've given us and as a body in love and as a body in hope, we extend your invitation even now. In Jesus name. Amen.

Would you come? Will you be the first? Maybe the first of many? You may be the only one that comes, but I just want to challenge you to say, Lord, I call upon You and I come to Jesus today. Come right now as we sing.

