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Because of Easter – Gifted Disciples

Graduate Recognition Sunday

I Peter 4:10, 11

May 22, 2005

Inspiration for sermons sometimes come from strange places. As many of you know, we had my mother with us for about a week. On Tuesday evening I took her back to her home out near Altoona. I stayed there overnight and on Wednesday morning did a few things that she needed done around her house. One thing Mom asked me to do was to install a small wood shelf with curtain rod over the window in her bedroom.

The shelf came in a box. I believe that she had bought it from a mail order company. So I laid out the pieces and started putting them together. As I was putting those pieces together the phrase “value added” suddenly popped into my head. Now I don't remember where I first heard that phrase. I'm not even sure exactly what it means.

But that phrase got me thinking about life. About the life that God gives to each of us . . . and what we do with it. As I worked on this message later in the week, I did some research on the term *value added*. I often do Google searches when I want to find out more info about a subject. So I did a Google search of the phrase *value added*. That Google search returned over 64 million responses. One site gave the following definition:

Value-Added - To be a value added action the action must meet all three of the following criteria:

- 1) The customer is willing to pay for this activity.
- 2) It must be done right the first time.
- 3) The action must somehow change the product or service in some manner.

That part seemed to make sense. I'm not sure what followed was especially helpful . . .

You will need to look for the "7 elements of waste" and when categorizing need to break out your % split into:

- % True Value Added
- % True Non Value Added, and
- % Necessary Waste (i.e legal requirement).

If your processes are typical then the %VA will be less than 5%.

<http://www.isixsigma.com/dictionary/Value-Added-134.htm>

Oh well . . . and then I found this definition from *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000.*

ADJECTIVE: Of or relating to the estimated value that is added to a product or material at each stage of its manufacture or distribution.

<http://www.bartleby.com/61/61/V0016100.html>

Today is our Graduate Recognition Sunday. I'm glad for each of you. You have attained an important milestone in life. There is a whole lot more that still lies ahead, but it's good to pause to give thanks for the accomplishments that you have made so far. Now in just a few minutes I want to look with you at what it means to live a *value added* life. But first let me say that again this morning I am continuing the series *Because of Easter*. What are the results . . . what are the benefits of Jesus rising from the dead? What is important about Easter?

Three weeks ago, Pastor Kathy noted in her sermon – Because of Easter, you and I have the possibility of living a new life, set free from our sin and our guilt. Two weeks ago, I preached on the Ascension of Jesus. Because of Easter, Jesus returned to his Father in heaven and left his work to his disciples and to us. Last week we celebrated Pentecost Sunday. Because of Easter, God poured out the Holy Spirit on the disciples and the church was born. And today, as we are reminded over and over again in the New Testament . . . because of Easter, God gave us

the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that . . . we can be in service and mission helping to bring God's love to a lost and hurting world.

Today, I want to look more closely with you at the gifts that God has given to each one of us . . . and what he expects us to do with them. The text I want to use for the morning comes from I Peter 4:10-11. If you have your Bibles, please open and follow along.

¹⁰Like good stewards [like good managers] of the manifold [many faceted] grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

As I read this verse, we have value . . . we have worth . . . not because of what we acquire . . . but because of who we are . . . and whose we are. You and I are not mistakes. We are not accidents that somehow just happened. We are the children of a loving heavenly Father. Do we know it? Do we know that God loved us so much that he died on the cross to save us? Do we know that Jesus rose from the dead that we might experience new life . . . not just someday in heaven . . . but here . . . now. Do we know the joy of being cleansed forgiven children of God?

Are we living our lives with the awareness that all that we have or hope to be comes from God? Do we know that we belong to God? That God has a plan and a purpose for each of our lives?

Do we know that we are gifted children of God? That we each have received gifts that God intends us to use for ministry and service? No, as I said to the children this morning the gifts are not all the same. Some have the gift of music. (I am very grateful for the willingness of our children to share their gifts in the service of the morning.) Some have the gift of words. Some have the gift of using their hands. Some are craftsmen. Some are cooks. Some are drivers. Some are artists. Some have the gift of listening. Some are gifted as the prayer warriors of the church. One person told me just yesterday, that as she is considering retirement, she is considering starting a ministry of knitting prayer shawls. I think that's wonderful. God has given each of us a gift, what are we doing with it?

¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.

Our lives are valuable because of who we are. But what are we doing with what we've been given? Value added . . . value subtracted . . . value appreciated . . . value depreciated.

There are many examples that I could use. Let's just talk about cars. Suppose you have a car. Perhaps you even bought it new. As anyone who has ever bought a new car knows all too well, the moment you drive it off the lot, that car has already begun to lose value. You've got two choices. You can take care of that car . . . do the proper maintenance . . . do the car care . . . and . . . if you keep it long enough . . . and . . . if you continue to take proper care of it . . . that car may actually appreciate in value.

On the other hand . . . if you don't do the maintenance . . . if you don't keep it washed and vacuumed . . . if you have a couple of accidents . . . if you let the oil run low or the coolant run low . . . if the only reason you ever remove any of the trash that just naturally accumulates in it is to make a little room to take along a passenger . . . there comes a time when that car isn't worth very much. You may even have to pay to have someone to haul it away. Value added . . . or value subtracted.

What's true about things is also true about people. We have a choice in how we live our lives. We can be givers . . . or we can be takers. We can be value adders . . . or value subtracters. We can be contributors . . . or we can be consumers.

Are we living our lives in such a way that we add value to the lives of those we meet each day. God has poured his spirit into our lives. He has given us talents . . . abilities . . . gifts. Are we adding value to our lives and to the lives of others? If we use our gifts the way God intends . . . we not only add value to the lives of others . . . we add value to our lives as well. Many of you have told of the joy that you have experienced as you have used your gifts to help others.

That's value added. We are adding value to the lives of others. We are adding value to our own lives as well. But . . . we don't do it by ourselves. Have you ever lifted a barn? I haven't either. Do you think you could lift a barn?

Herman Ostry, a farmer in Bruno, Nebraska, did . . . along with a few friends. Shortly after buying a piece of land with a barn on it, a nearby creek rose, flooding the barn with twenty-nine inches of water. Herman half-jokingly said to his family, "I bet if we had enough people, we could pick up that barn and carry it to higher ground."

His son Mike began to do some calculating. He did some figuring and decided that the barn weighed about 19,000 pounds. And . . . if each person lifted about fifty-five pounds . . . I have a bag of sand here this morning. It weighed about 52 pounds when I weighted it this morning. 52 pounds. For most of us, that's probably not an easy lift . . . but we could do it . . . well Mike figured out that if each person could lift 55 pounds it would only take 344 people to carry the barn to higher ground. Mike then went on to design a grid of steel tubing and he attach it to the inside of the barn. Then he put handles all around the outside of of the barn and bolted it to the tubing. Finally, on July 30, 1988, the the town of Bruno celebrated its centennial. On that day 344 people took their places. As thousands watched, Herman Ostry counted, "One, two, three..."

On the first attempt, the barn was lifted effortlessly. The crowd cheered as they carried that nine and a half ton barn 143 feet up the hill in just three minutes. When they got to the top of the hill they turned it and set it down facing another direction.

(This story comes from Dave Stone at: <http://www.preachingplus.com/DisplaySermon.aspx?id=539>)

I like that story. I like that story a lot. It highlights what can be done, when people are motivated by a common goal . . . when they catch the vision of what can be done . . . when each does his / her part. But . . . as we use the gifts that God has given us, we discover that we will do what we never dreamed possible. Not just because we each do our part, but because the spirit of God is working in and through us. Will we allow God to work in and through us? Will we experience the joy that God wants us to know. I pray that we will.