

Read Exodus 25:1-9, 31:1-11, 1 Corinthians 12:4-18

I'm sure you've heard the joke about the man who goes into the church and prays. "O Lord, you know the mess I'm in, please let me win the lottery." The next week, he's back again, and this time he's complaining. "O Lord, didn't you hear my prayer last week? I'll lose everything I hold dear unless I win the lottery." The third week, he comes back and this time he's desperate. "O Lord, this is the third time I've prayed to you to let me win the lottery! I ask and I plead and still you don't help me!" Suddenly a booming voice sounds from heaven. "John, be reasonable. Meet me halfway. Buy a lottery ticket!"

Then there's another man who also believed in God. He is sitting on his porch as flood waters rise. A woman floats by in a boat and yells, "Do you need help?" "No, thank you," he replies, "I'm trusting in the Lord." The waters rise higher, sending the man upstairs. A raft full of people floats by his second story window. "Get in," they say, "there's plenty of room." "No thanks," he replies, "I'm trusting in the Lord." The flood waters keep rising, pushing the man up to the roof. A helicopter swoops in, lowering its ladder for the man. "Thanks," shouts the man, "but I'm trusting in the Lord." Finally, the man is swept away in the torrent and drowns. At the gates of Heaven, the man asks God, "Why didn't you save me?" "What do you mean?" replies God, "I sent two boats and a helicopter."

Moral of these stories: Seize the opportunity; respond to God

These last few weeks our focus has been on what it means to have a covenant relationship with God. Israel covenanted with God to an exclusive relationship. God was present with them; and God is present with us. God loves us and communicates what's important to God through the Ten Commandments. We are to love God and love our neighbor. So in gratitude we live that out.

In today's story God plans to make God's dwelling right in the midst of the people. So God asks the people to bring an offering to be used to build God a place; a mobile sanctuary. The purpose of this place of worship was for the people to understand and experience the fact of God's Presence.

In Exodus 25 God says to Moses: "Tell the Israelites to take an offering for me, from all whose hearts prompt them to give." And God defined the offering. It was the very best – precious metals and fine cloth; leather; wood; and gems. These things would be used to build and furnish the temple.

These things were elaborate, and God took great care to describe the design and placement of each piece of furniture, utensil, sculpture, artwork, and fabric. This was one specially designed place and Moses was told, "Make them exactly according to the pattern that you were shown (25:40, 26:30).

So, Moses told the people just that – God wants us to build Him a place to dwell among us, paid for by the generosity of the people. It was an offering. No one was forced or required to do it. And what an offering it was. Listen to the story.

READ EX 35:21-29 (picture of people bringing jewels and linen and leather)

The people caught the vision. They did something and their gifts reflected them. They didn't just "make do" or bring just barely enough, nor did they feel that God asked too much. They wanted to do something. With incredible generosity they brought exactly what was asked for to do the work. This temple would be the best.

If you had been there, if you had been asked, if you were asked now, would you be a part of that crowd of givers? How is your mind and heart toward God's work? Are you of the mindset that this house of worship is special and important?

To those people it was highly important. They seized the opportunity.

Have you experienced how good it feels to take part in the purpose of God, to be part of the action? How can you be a part of things here at FPCD?

You too can seize the opportunity. Let's see what happened. READ EX 36:2-7

So now how do you build something heard in prayer by one man on a mountain?

God says, "By my Spirit."

To do the construction God searched out an excellent craftsman. Are any of you excellent craftsmen? Watch for your call! God took this man just as he was and then filled him with the Spirit, enhancing what the man already did well. God used what the man already felt passionate about.

God wants to use what you already do well. With God's Holy Spirit and your willingness, you can do more than you can imagine or think.

But it takes something. You must seize the opportunity. You must say, "Yeah, I want that!" Faith is not passive; it must be active.

Paul tells us, "You all have different varieties of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. And there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (1 Cor 12:4-6).

Did you hear that? The same Spirit, the same Lord (Jesus), and the same God who was there is here.

You see, God is still present, God is still at work – through you!

A few years ago – 500 to be exact – there lived a man named Michelangelo. He said, "I am a poor man and of little worth, who is laboring in that art that God has given me in order to extend my life as long as possible."

Isn't that great? For Michelangelo, living out his passion gave him purpose in life. Exercising his gifts gave him reason to live.

We are all given gifts and Christians are called to engage the skills we are given. Michelangelo said, "The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark."

He was 23 years old when he sculpted the Pieta. He was the ripe old age of 33 when he painted the Sistine Chapel. It only took him four years. When you love what you do and you place it in God's hand, amazing things happen.

God has given you talents. Have you considered putting your skills in God's hands?

He started young. And he painted long - until the age of 89, when he died. Michelangelo said, "Many believe, and I believe, that I have been designated for this work by God. In spite of my old age, I do not want to give it up; I work out of love for God and I put all my hope in Him.

Michelangelo seized the opportunity.

The New Testament goes deeper into this subject. Paul says we each have a spiritual gift so we can help each other. To God, every one of you has an important place in the body.

Are you using your talent for the church? If not, the body of Christ is handicapped.

Paul says it takes all of us, in all of our variety. God has put each part just where he wants it. What if we at FPCD had a star athlete's body? What if we all engaged our talents and then asked for a huge dose of the Holy Spirit?

Can you imagine what God could do? You are so gifted, and through God's power we would be unstoppable for the kingdom of God.

You see it's a partnership. You are partners with God. You have a part too. When you give, the church becomes strong. When you see with God's vision and use your gifts we all thrive, and you are a witness to the world, just like Michelangelo and thousands after him.

Is your heart open? The health of the church depends on it. You are vital. Will you offer your gift?

Seize the opportunity!

AMEN