**Series: Questions God Asks**

**Sermon: What’s In Your Hand?**

A large organization, having struggled to get good employees, finally hired several cannibals. After conducting a lengthy new hire orientation the human resource director congratulated the cannibals and said,

“*You are all part of the team now! You get all of the benefits we have discussed and you can enjoy our company cafe free of charge! But please don’t eat any of the other employees*.”

Each of the cannibals promised they wouldn’t.

After many few weeks the cannibal’s boss seemed very pleased, but also a little worried. She said, “*You’re all working very hard, and I’m satisfied with you. However, one of our secretaries has disappeared. Do any of you know what happened to her?*”

The cannibals all shook their heads, “*No*.”

After the boss had left, the leader of the cannibals was a bit angry and said, “*Okay, which one of you dummies ate the secretary?*”

A hand rose hesitantly in admission. “*You fool!” said the leader, “For weeks we’ve been eating managers and no one noticed anything, but nooo, you had to go and eat someone important!*”

The humor of that joke is the fact that people often think that the most important members of an organization are the ones with the titles. While it’s true that the people with titles play important roles, it’s equally true that nothing happens without the efforts of the “little guys”.

This is true in every company, business, club, political party, and church. Especially in a volunteer organization like a church, nothing happens without participation from the members. I’ve said this many times before, the ministry of Agape Christian Church is what all of us make it. It’s not our Elders, It’s not our staff. It’s not Ben and me. It’s all of us who make Agape Christian Church. We make our ministry.

As I was preparing this sermon I spent a morning looking through my library of books on leadership. As I read I noticed something I hadn’t noticed before. Just about every book has a section lamenting the dearth of people who will do more than watch someone else lead.

Current surveys about attitudes toward churches make clear that people hunger for a church that’s doing something significant but simultaneously avoid making it happen. The authors suggest that people want the rewards of a great church but without the hard work and commitment required to make it a great church.

That’s a polite way of saying that we want great churches but we aren’t willing to be the ones who make them great. Most want to watch others do ministry while they enjoy the benefit.

My observation is that we’re very good at excusing ourselves from doing anything more than attending worship services.

* *I’m not comfortable being in front.*
* *I don’t know the Bible well enough to lead other Christians.*
* *I’m just not the leadership type.*
* *I’m too shy.*
* *I’m not gifted in anything the church is doing.*
* *I haven’t been around long enough.*
* *I get too nervous.*
* *I don’t feel called to anything.*

I think some Christians suffer from entitlement, that is they believe God (and life) owes them something so they go from church to church looking for it. They never find it of course, but they keep searching.

Some Christians suffer from the false assumption that church should be pleasing and without the conflicts and troubles that other organizations of people experience. When they see that it isn’t that way, they withdraw, or they become hostile and cynical. Either way they don’t do anything.

When individual Christians refuse to get busy as the church there results an underlying feeling of depression and despair. Depression in the sense that they don’t care if their church is significant in any real way. Despair in the sense that they have no hope for their church to be anything more than it is.

What this all means is that the reason many churches aren’t doing anything life-changing is because most Christians aren’t doing anything life-changing. I realize that some people are likely to get angry with me today but understand, I’m not singling anybody out. I’m talking to everybody.

The Bible is clear, every believer is called to do something. 1 Corinthians 12 is all about this. As Paul taught about spiritual gifts he wrote, *to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.* 1 Corinthians12:7

If you’re a Christian you have been given something to contribute to the ministry of your church. The pronoun  means both each one and every one.

If you’re a Christian you have been given something to contribute. Whatever it is, it wasn’t given for you to hoard or to show off. It was given for you to contribute for the common good. The word is actually “for benefit”.  means that these gifts are for profit of the mission of God.

But many Christians don’t use their gifts.

* *Oh, I just can’t.*
* *I’m too busy.*
* *I’m not confident enough.*
* *I’m not a leader.*
* *I get too flustered*.

When we think and say things like that

* We close ourselves off from the call of God in our lives.
* We’ve decided our own destiny.
* We’re pre-occupied with ourselves so that we’re not open to God’s mission, larger than our own limitations.
* We’ve shrunk God down to the size of our own personal frailties and limitations
* We’re not allowing for divine contingencies.
* We’re not open to explore a world that has something besides ourselves at the center.
* And we never quite get to God’s purpose.

One of God’s greatest servants was just like us. God called him but he didn’t want to answer. He had very convincing excuses (at least to himself) until God asked, *What’s in your hand*?

I’ll assume you’re familiar with the whole burning bush thing. God appeared to Moses in flames of fire in a bush that refused to be consumed by the flames. God spoke to Moses out of that burning bush and told him that he was going to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt.

Moses tried to weasel out of it but God wouldn’t let him.

* *I’m nobody*, Moses said. And God said, *I will be with you*. (Ex. 3:12)
* *What if nobody listens to me?* Moses said*. Tell them I sent you,* God said. (Ex. 3:14)
* *What if nobody believes you sent me?* Moses said. *What’s in your hand?* God asked. (Ex. 4:2)

Moses was holding a staff, a “*maht-te*”. Some suppose it was a baton like a royal of Egypt might carry, but since it had been 40 years since he was in Egypt I think it more likely that it was a staff like a shepherd would carry, perhaps something an old man could lean on for balance, but that’s all it was.

Years ago our friend Tommy Oaks preached a sermon along this line. Some of you will remember how he referred to what was in Moses hand: *A rod, a stick, a piece of wood*.

The point is, it was nothing special. It was just a stick. It wouldn’t impress the Israelites nor the Egyptians. Moses had to be thinking. *I’m holding a stick, one I had broken off a tree in the valley and whittled smooth during years of watching critters grazing in a pasture*. *So what? Am I supposed to become a leader?*

In fact that’s what God had in mind, but Moses needed some convincing. So God told him to throw his stick on the ground. Moses did at it turned into a snake. “*Na hash*“ is a generic word for any species of snake.

That Moses ran from it, doesn’t necessarily mean it was venomous. Most people I know run from snakes – except Asa Wood. He would have made that thing a pet.

God told him to pick it up by the tail. Moses was not the 1300 BC predecessor to Steve Irwin, but he obeyed God and picked up the snake by the tail. It turned back into a stick.

God wasn’t showing off. He was showing Moses that it wasn’t necessary for him to be good at leading, he just had to be willing to do something. When Moses obeyed, God did His thing.

* God stripped away Moses’ objections.
* God reminded him that he would not be representing himself in Egypt. He would be representing Jehovah God.

The Bible tells us that after arguing with Moses God’s patience ran out…*The Lord’s anger burned against Moses*. Exodus 4:14 God had enough of Moses’ self-absorbed pity.

If you will allow me, on behalf of our great God I ask you, *What’s in your hand?*

God calls every one of us to serve His mission, and unless you are actively participating in this mission, and I would personally add “at full capacity”, you’re being like Moses until God’s anger burned against him.

Speaking to His followers Jesus said, *You did not choose me, but I have chosen you and appointed you to bear fruit*. John 15:16 Isn’t that exciting? He chose us.

* Jesus chose us to serve His mission. He could have chosen anybody. He chose us.
* *I chose you to bear fruit.* He didn’t choose us to be pretty. He chose us to serve in His mission.

At the risk of getting off on a tangent let me point out what Jesus said next: *Then the Father will give you whatever you ask for in my name*. John 15:16 I know a lot of people struggle with God not answering their prayers the way they think He should, even though they say “*In Jesus name*.” Maybe God is holding the “*give whatever you ask*” part until you to do the “*bear fruit”* part.

I want to share three thoughts in connection to what Jesus said, *I have chosen you and appointed you to bear fruit*.

1. **God doesn’t do random**.

I don’t believe nor do I teach that God has predestined every breath of your life, but I do believe and teach that He has a plan for each of us. For example His plan included…

* that I was born into a family of a man who was led to Christ as an adult.
* that was born to a family in America
* I believe that His plan included that I would be a preacher

The Bible says, *We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*. Ephesians 2:10 We have a right to say “*No*” but understand, God has prepared a plan for each of us.

God doesn’t do random and God doesn’t make mistakes. A word you never find in the Bible? Oops! Not once do we read of God saying, *Sorry. I got that wrong*.

God chose me, and He chose you for a purpose, and He wants us to succeed. Wayne Cordeiro in his book Doing Church as a Team wrote,

*If God didn’t have a special purpose for you and if He didn’t want you to succeed, then you wouldn’t have been born*.

I don’t necessarily agree with that but his thinking behind it is right, God has a purpose for you even if it’s not a specific service.

You may choose to ignore God, but He has something in mind for you. You are not a random creation!

1. My second thought from Jesus’ choosing us is that **we only get one shot at life**.

We’re riding on a rock moving at more than 60,000 miles per hour. We’re rotating faster than a fidget spinner. When someone says “*Time flies*” they couldn’t be more right.

* In Psalm 144:4 David refers to a man’s days as “*like a breath*”.
* In Psalm 90:9 he says our years are summed up with a “sigh”.
* Jesus’ brother James wrote that our days are like *a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*. (James 4:14)

Jesus didn’t die for this breath or sigh. He didn’t suffer for the mist. He went to the cross for our eternity.

(Put a single dot on the screen; 4 point font if possible)

This dot is your life. Everything out side of this, including everything beyond the screen is eternity.

Most people love that dot. They sacrifice for that dot. They save for that dot. They live for that dot. God so loved us that He sent His Son to bring that dot into all eternity.

The Bible tells us that God…*has set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.* Ecclesiastes 3:11

People don’t understand God and what He has done. I believe that’s because instead of accepting who God says He is, they create their own idea of what God must be and reject anything that doesn’t fit. As Blaise Pascal wrote, *there is a God-shaped hole in the heart of every man*, but men try to deny God and fill this void with material.

We only get one shot at life. We each need to ask ourselves, *Am I living for the dot or for eternity?* We know we’re living for eternity when we’re pursuing the purpose God has for us.

1. One more thought, Jesus didn’t simply choose us to save us. **He chose us to serve God’s purpose**.

If His only reason for saving us was to get us to Heaven there’d be no reason to leave us here now. But it’s more than getting us to Heaven. He saved us because He chose us to be involved in His mission.

When you got saved, God lifted you out of that dot, gifted you with something in your hand, and then put you back in the dot with a purpose to serve His mission. I don’t know whose idea this was originally but I like it: *We will have all eternity to boast about the victories won on the Earth, but we have only a breath to win them*.

When we get to Heaven it will be wonderful. We’ll see incredible beauty and joy. Do you know what we won’t see? We won’t see any more opportunities to pursue God’s mission.

There won’t be any unsaved people for us to reach with the Gospel. There’ll be no one to help know and grow in Christ. God chose your life on Earth to pursue His purpose here and now.

God is constantly calling us to His mission. He’s calling you. I think we need to be careful about our excuses:

* *I’m not good enough.*
* *I’m not smart enough.*
* *I don’t have time.*
* *I don’t have the skill set.*

We aren’t good enough or smart enough. We don’t have the time or skill set. But we don’t have to.

*What’s in your hand?* I think God would say to us, *My mission isn’t dependent on your skill or intelligence, or your goodness or ability. I’m not limited by your weakness. My mission will succeed with my power. I just need you to be willing*.

This sermon is about using what God has given us in service to His mission. So many Christians never get involved. We have our excuses – but I think God is asking, *What’s in your hand?*

* *Don’t you think I can overcome your weaknesses?*
* *Don’t you think I can make your efforts produce fruit?*
* *I chose you to serve my mission.*

There was a nurse, a Christian, who had a particular patient in her intensive care unit. He was not quite 60 years old but he seemed to be dying. As she cared for him she also prayed for his salvation even though he wasn’t awake.

As days went by his chance for recovery grew dim. One evening his breathing became so difficult and labored that they feared he wouldn’t make it through the night. That nurse spent extra hours attending him, all the time praying.

The following day when she went to work she expected to find an empty bed, but instead she found the man sitting up, eating, and looking remarkably healthy.

* *Praise the Lord*, she said. *You’re healed*.
* *Yup!* He replied. *I feel great. You and your prayer…you healed me*.
* *Oh no,* she said*.* *God did. Now it is your responsibility to find out why*.

God didn’t save us so we could fill the church. He didn’t save us so that we can ask Him for things. He saved us for a purpose. Now it’s our responsibility to find out why.

Jesus once asked, *What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but forfeit his soul?* Mark 8:36 Certainly this challenges one who doesn’t know the Savior, but what about we who have accepted Jesus?

I think we should understand it like this: *What does it profit a Christian if all his prayers are answered - a nice home, good income, every blessing – but he misses the purpose for which God saved him?*

Let’s ask ourselves:

* Why did God create me?
* Why did He put me here?
* Since He makes no mistakes and He isn’t limited by my abilities, what does He want me to do?

Jesus chose us to bear fruit. The ministry of Agape Christian Church isn’t about Ben and me. It’s about all of us. The most important people in this mission are not the ones with titles. The most important people in God’s mission are every one of us.

Are you serving God’s mission? What’s in your hand?