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Shaped for Serving God Mark 10:35-44, 1 Peter 4:8-11

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Mother's Day is a very appropriate day to consider the fourth purpose of our life, **"You were shaped for serving God."** Serving is a significant part of a mother's job description. I want to thank Mary Jo Gregory for passing on the following answers given by elementary school children about mothers.

Why did God make mothers?

To help us out of there when we were getting born.

She's the only one who knows where the scotch tape is.

Mostly to clean the house.

How did God make mothers? He used dirt, just like for the rest of us.

What ingredients are mothers made of? God made mothers out of clouds and angel hair and everything nice in the world and one dab of mean.

What kind of little girl was your mom?

My mom has always been my mom and none of that other stuff.

I don't know because I wasn't there, but my guess would be pretty bossy.

What did mom need to know about dad before she married him? His last name.

Does he make at least \$800 a year? Did he say NO to drugs and YES to chores?

What does your mom do in her spare time? Mothers don't do spare time.

To hear her tell it, she pays bills all day long.

What's the difference between moms and dads?

Moms have magic, they make you feel better without medicine.

Moms work at work and work at home, and dads just go to work at work.

If you could change one thing about your mom, what would it be?

She has this weird thing about me keeping my room clean. I'd get rid of that.

I'd make my mom smarter. Then she would know it was my sister who did it and not me.

I would like for her to get rid of those invisible eyes on the back of her head.

Mothers understand 1 Peter 4:8-11,

*“Above all, **maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.** Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, **serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.***

*Whoever 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.** To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”*

You were shaped to serve God. Service is not optional. Whatever we are good at, we can be doing for God and for the church. For the last ten years at BBC we have placed such an emphasis on ministry and serving that we could talk about the countless ways people *are* serving – look at the Goldenrod color insert that lists BBC Ministry Opportunities. There are **over 50 different** ministries, groups, and events listed in which to serve God and other people. “*You were put on earth to make a contribution*” (PDL, 227), and there are certainly lots of ways for everyone to make a contribution at BBC. Sunday School teachers prepare lessons each week, give of their time, and embody the love of Jesus for our children, students, and adults. Caring nurses, Cooks Who Care, all those who serve by making sure there are refreshments after worship to encourage people to stick around and visit with one another. People who stock the Caring Cupboard and meet our neighbors in need of food and who share a caring smile. We could talk about everyone who serves by visiting members and friends of the church, sharing a caring presence, reading to people, bringing communion, or an encouraging word. The members of the Worship Team and the choir serve through music to bless the Lord and all of us when we gather in God’s name. The Worship Welcomers, various ministries that serve women and men, our media, technology, and office volunteers, the list goes on and on. We have hundreds of people serving under God’s umbrella in over 50 ministries.

I love the theme for our ministry fair next week, Serving Under God’s Umbrella, for several reasons, first of all because God’s umbrella is really, really, big. An old hymn seeking to describe the awesome greatness of God says, “Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.” A lot of folks can fit under God’s canopy or umbrella and there is room for all of us to find our place. We all have to do our part. Each of the ministries and persons are like the spines of the umbrella that hold up the canvas. When even one or

two are broken or not functioning the way they should, the whole umbrella loses its shape and becomes useless, powerless to fulfill its purpose to protect us from rain. When an umbrella is strong it serves its purpose and protects us from the rain or the sun

Jesus says clearly in Mark 10:42-42 that those who are great are to live as servants.¹ **Jesus came to serve and to give and serving and giving sum up God's fourth purpose for our life** (PDL, 231). **Jesus says we are to be servants of God.** When we're young we think and dream about what we want to do or who we want to be when we grow up. Different people have different dreams. Whatever we imagined doing, I doubt there are many of us who said, "*When I grow up, I want to be a servant.*" Jesus makes it clear serving others helps to train us away from arrogance, envy, and resentment. Rick Warren says, "*If I have no love for others, no desire to serve others, and I'm only concerned about my needs, I should question whether Christ is really in my life. A saved heart is one that wants to serve*" (PDL, 228).

We are all called and shaped to be ministers, to be servants serving under God's umbrella. Henri Nouwen wrote, "*No Christian is a Christian without being a minister. Whatever form the Christian ministry takes, the basis is always the same: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*"²

We know we have reached a level of spiritual maturity when we stop asking, "*Who's going to meet my needs? Who's going to serve me?*" and start asking, "*Whose needs can I meet? Who can I serve?*" Mature believers are more concerned about serving and reaching out than about our own convenience and comfort. As we grow as disciples our attitude starts to shift from, "*I'm looking for a church that meets my needs and blesses me,*" to "*I'm looking for a place to serve and be a blessing.*"

The prayer of Saint Francis expresses this other focused, ministry oriented spiritual maturity.

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace!
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury pardon; where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and

² Henri Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, Image Books, New York, 1971, 114.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and
It is in dying that we are born to Eternal life.”

As St. Francis’ prayer expresses so well, **servants give their all and take responsibility to serve their master**, rather than sitting back and complaining because no one is doing anything for them. One of my favorite stories that I’ve told you before is about when people of European descent were moving into the American west, and the major means of transportation was the stagecoach. We’ve all seen them in movies. The stagecoach had three different kinds of tickets – first class, second class, and third class. If you had a first-class ticket, you could remain seated during the entire trip no matter what happened. If the stagecoach got stuck in the mud, or had trouble making it up a steep hill, or even if a wheel fell off, you could remain seated if you had a first-class ticket.

If you had a second-class ticket you could also remain seated- until there was a problem. In case of a problem, those holding a second-class ticket would have to get off until the problem was resolved. You could stand off to one side and watched as other people worked. You didn’t have to get your hands dirty. But if you had a second-class ticket you were not allowed to stay on board. When the stagecoach was unstuck, you could get back on board and take your seat.

If you had a third-class ticket, you would definitely have to get off if there was a problem **because it was your responsibility to help solve the problem**. You had to get out and/or push or help fix a broken wheel or whatever was needed because you only had a third-class ticket.

In the church, no one is holding a first or second-class ticket. We’re all traveling third-class. We’re all called to serve, to take responsibility, to help solve problems and to meet needs. Churches and indeed all organizations get into trouble when some people think they are holding a first or second-class ticket. **Some folks get**

the mistaken idea that being a part of church is about sitting under God's umbrella rather than serving under it.

One person contributing or failing to contribute can make a significant difference. A priest received a letter marked, "*Please give to Harry the Usher.*"

It was handed over to Harry, and this is what it said.

"Dear Harry. I'm sorry I don't know your last name, but then, you don't know mine. I'm Gert, Gert at the ten o'clock Mass every Sunday. I'm writing to ask you a favor. I don't know the priests too well, but somehow I feel close to you. I don't know how you got to know my first name, but every Sunday morning you smile and greet me by name, and we exchange a few words: how bad the weather is, how much you like my hat, and how I am late on a particular Sunday. I just wanted to say thank you for taking the time to remember an old woman, for the smiles, for your consideration, for your thoughtfulness.

"Now for the favor. I am dying, Harry. My husband has been dead for sixteen years, and the kids are scattered. It is very important to me that when they bring me to church for the last time, you will be there to say, '*Hello, Gert. Good to see you.*' If you are there, Harry, I will feel assured that your warm hospitality will be duplicated in my new home in heaven. With love and gratitude, Gert."

When we use our gifts as servants of the Lord and servants of each other, whether gifts of hospitality like our Worship Welcomers, or mercy or teaching or anything else we are touching lives in ways greater than we know.

Puccini wrote a number of great operas including *La Boheme*. When he was still a fairly young man, he contracted cancer, and so he decided to spend his last days writing his final opera, *Turnandot*, which is one of his most polished pieces. When his friends and disciples would say to him, "*You are ailing; take it easy and rest,*" he would always respond, "*I am going to do as much as I can on my great masterwork and it's up to you my friends, to finish it if I don't.*" Puccini died before he could complete the opera.

Now his friends had a choice. They could forever mourn their friend and return to life as usual – or they could build on his melody and finish what he started. They choose the latter. And so, in 1926 at the famous La Scala Opera House in Milan, Italy, Puccini's opera was played for the first time, conducted by the famed conductor Arturo Toscanini.

When it came to the part in the opera where the master had stopped writing because he died, Toscanini stopped everything, turned around with tears welling up in his eyes, and said to the large audience, “*This is where the master ends.*” And he wept. But then, after a few moments, he lifted up his head, smiled broadly and said, “*And this is where his friends began.*” Then he finished conducting the opera.³

Where our master Jesus ends, as far as his death and resurrection, is where his friends and disciples build on the melody he began, using our spiritual gifts, our passion, our abilities, our personality, and our experiences as a community of servants in his power and in his name to help others along their journeys. You were shaped to serve God. Service is not optional. Whatever we are good at, we can be doing for God and for the church. Be an instrument of God’s peace.

And remember, “Above all, **maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.** Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, **serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received...**

Serve with the strength that God supplies, **so that God may be glorified** in all things through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”

Blessing: “**Do all the good that 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.” John Wesley**

³ William J. Bausch, A World of Stories, p. 300.