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Every Member Is a Minister

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READINGS
OT Num. 11:24-30; Psalm 92; Epistle Acts 6:1-7; Gospel John 15:12-19

Laity Sunday

Key Verse –

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last.” - John 15:16

The Church is not a congregation of a few ministers surrounded by thousands of spectators. The Church is the Body of Christ, in which every believer has been called, gifted, and commissioned to participate in the ministry of God. The traditional understanding that ministry belongs only to ordained clergy has often created a distinction between the “minister” and the “member.” But the New Testament presents a much broader and richer understanding: every member is called to be a minister. This does not mean that every member has the same office or performs the same function. The Bible clearly recognises different gifts, ministries, and responsibilities. Some are called to preach, some to teach, some to lead, some to serve, some to encourage, some to give, some to care for the sick and suffering, and some to carry the Gospel to places where Christ is not known. But every Christian is called to serve. Martin Luther gave great emphasis to what became known as the “priesthood of all believers.” Luther challenged the idea that there was a spiritual class called the clergy and another class called the laity, with only the former having a genuine vocation in the service of God. For Luther, through baptism and faith in Christ, every believer has direct access to God and is called to serve the neighbour. The Reformation therefore recovered an important biblical truth: Christian ministry is not restricted to the pulpit. The whole life of the believer can become ministry. The four passages appointed for our reflection today reveal four dimensions of this calling. Numbers 11 teaches us that God gives His Spirit to ordinary people for ministry. Psalm 92 reminds us that every believer can bear fruit and remain useful in God’s service. Acts 6 demonstrates that every ministry of service is important to the mission of the Church. John 15 reminds us that Christ Himself chooses and appoints His disciples to bear lasting fruit. Together, these passages proclaim one powerful message: Every member is a minister.

1. Every Member Can Be Empowered by the Spirit (Numbers 11:24-30)

The first lesson comes from the remarkable experience recorded in Numbers 11. Moses was carrying an enormous burden. The people were complaining, and the responsibility of leading the whole community had become overwhelming. Moses expressed his inability to carry the burden alone. God responded by asking Moses to gather seventy elders of Israel. The Spirit that rested upon Moses was placed upon these elders, and they began to prophesy. The significance of the passage is profound. God did not intend Moses to do everything himself. He multiplied the ministry by sharing the responsibility with others. There is an important principle here for the Church today: God’s work is too great to be carried by one person or by a small group of leaders. Even more striking is what

happened with Eldad and Medad. They remained in the camp, yet the Spirit came upon them and they prophesied. Joshua became concerned and asked Moses to stop them. But Moses responded, “I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (Num. 11:29). Moses understood something that every generation of the Church needs to rediscover. The Spirit of God is not the private possession of a religious elite. God desires to equip His people for His purposes. This becomes even clearer in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts among believers. The Church is strengthened when these gifts are recognised and used. There is a simple illustration from an orchestra. An orchestra may have one conductor, but the music does not come from the conductor alone. The conductor cannot produce the sound of every violin, flute, trumpet, drum, and piano. Each musician has a different instrument and a different responsibility. When everyone plays faithfully under the direction of the conductor, beautiful music is produced. The Church is like that. A bishop cannot do the work of every member. A presbyter cannot visit every home, teach every child, counsel every young person, care for every elderly person, and reach every neighbourhood. Ministry becomes powerful when every member discovers his or her God-given gift. Therefore, the question is not merely, “Who is the minister of this Church?” The better question is, “What ministry has God entrusted to me?” Some may say, “I cannot preach.” That does not mean you cannot minister. You can pray. You can visit. You can encourage. You can teach a child. You can help a suffering family. You can share your testimony. You can support a missionary. You can welcome a stranger. You can serve the poor. You can use your professional knowledge for the good of others. The Spirit gives gifts to God’s people, and every member can become an instrument of God’s grace.

2. Every Member Can Bear Fruit (Psalm 92)

Psalm 92 gives us another beautiful picture of Christian ministry. The psalmist speaks of the righteous as those who “will flourish like a palm tree” and “will grow like a cedar of Lebanon.” Then comes the remarkable statement: “They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green” (Ps. 92:14). This is a powerful word for the Church. In God’s kingdom, usefulness is not limited by age. The world often measures people according to productivity, position, income, qualifications, or physical strength. But God’s measurement is different. A person may retire from employment without retiring from ministry. A retired teacher can still teach. A retired officer can still counsel. A grandmother can still pray for her grandchildren and the Church. An elderly person who cannot walk far may become one of the greatest intercessors in the congregation. A young person can serve through technology, music, communication, education, and outreach. A professional can use his or her expertise to strengthen the Church and society. The palm tree and cedar are particularly appropriate images. They represent stability, growth, endurance, and fruitfulness. Psalm 92 does not say that the righteous merely survive into old age. It says they continue to bear fruit.

There was a man who attended a church faithfully for many years. When he became old, he could no longer participate in many physical activities. Someone said to him, “You cannot do much for the Church now.” He replied, “I can still pray.” Every morning he prayed for the pastor, the congregation, missionaries, children, young people, and those who had stopped attending church. After his death, many people testified that they had been strengthened because of his prayers. His ministry had not ended when his physical strength diminished. In fact, his ministry had simply taken another form. That is the theology of Christian vocation. Ministry is not merely an occupation; it is a calling. The Church must therefore stop asking only, “Who can preach?” and begin asking, “Who

can serve?" The answer is: every member. A healthy Church is not merely one with a large attendance. It is one in which its members are bearing fruit.

3. Every Ministry of Service Is Ministry (Acts 6:1-7)

Acts 6 gives us one of the clearest biblical examples of the importance of every-member ministry. The early Church was growing rapidly, but growth brought practical problems. The Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles recognised that the problem needed to be addressed. They therefore called the community together and asked them to select seven people to take responsibility for this ministry. What is particularly interesting is the language used by the apostles: "We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:3-4). The apostles had their particular calling, but that did not make the ministry of food distribution less important. The seven chosen for this responsibility were also described as people "full of the Spirit and wisdom." This passage destroys the idea that some ministry is spiritual while other ministry is merely practical. Feeding hungry people is ministry. Visiting the sick is ministry. Looking after children is ministry. Maintaining the church building can be ministry. Organising a programme can be ministry. Welcoming visitors can be ministry. Supporting the elderly can be ministry. Financial stewardship can be ministry. Cleaning the place of worship can be ministry. The Christian understanding of service is that when it is done in Christ's name and for God's glory, even an apparently ordinary task can become a sacred ministry.

There is a story of a great cathedral where many workers were involved in its construction. Someone asked three workers what they were doing. The first said, "I am cutting stones." The second said, "I am earning my living." The third said, "I am building a cathedral." All three were doing the same physical work, but they understood their work differently. Christian service begins when we understand that what we do can become part of God's larger purpose. Acts 6 also gives us another important lesson: ministry should be shared. The apostles did not try to control every ministry themselves. They empowered others. They created space for other members to serve. The result was remarkable: "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly" (Acts 6:7). When members become ministers, the Church grows. When members remain spectators, the Church becomes dependent on a few people. The Church therefore needs not only good leaders but also active members.

4. Every Member Is Chosen and Sent to Bear Fruit (John 15:12-19)

The Gospel passage brings us to the heart of the matter. Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last" (John 15:16). This is our key verse. Jesus does not say, "I chose you merely to attend." He does not say, "I chose you merely to receive." He says, "I chose you and appointed you...to go and bear fruit." Christian discipleship is therefore both privilege and responsibility. Jesus first speaks about love: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Ministry begins with love. We cannot become authentic ministers without becoming people who love. Jesus then says that the disciples are His friends. He shares with them what He has received from the Father. He chooses them and sends them into the world. This is significant. We are not ministers because we have chosen a religious career. We are ministers because Christ has called us. Here Martin Luther's teaching about the universal priesthood becomes especially relevant. Luther emphasised that every Christian stands before God through Christ and is called to serve others. The baker, farmer, teacher,

doctor, homemaker, student, administrator, labourer, businessperson, and pastor can all live out a Christian vocation. The distinction is not between those who serve God and those who do not. The question is whether we recognise the calling of God in the particular place where He has placed us. A church member may never stand behind a pulpit, but he or she may preach through compassion. A person may never write a theological book, but may teach a child to pray. A person may never lead a worship service, but may lead a neighbour toward Christ through friendship. A person may never travel to another country as a missionary, but may become a missionary in the workplace, neighbourhood, school, hospital, or home. The Great Commission therefore belongs not merely to clergy but to the whole people of God. Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” Every Christian should ask: Why has Christ chosen me? Where has He sent me? What fruit does He want to produce through my life?

Conclusion

The message of these four passages is clear and compelling. Numbers 11 tells us that God empowers His people with His Spirit. Psalm 92 tells us that God expects His people to remain fruitful throughout their lives. Acts 6 tells us that every ministry of service is valuable to God and essential to the growth of the Church. John 15 tells us that Christ chooses and appoints His disciples to love, serve, go, and bear lasting fruit. Therefore, every member is a minister. The Church should not be a place where a few people perform ministry while everyone else watches. It should be a community in which every believer discovers a calling, receives encouragement, uses his or her gifts, and participates in God’s mission.

Imagine a church where every member says, “I have something to contribute.” The elderly pray. The young serve. Children learn to witness. Families care for neighbours. Professionals use their skills. Teachers teach. Musicians lead through worship. Missionaries go. Intercessors pray. Those with resources give. Those with time visit. Those with knowledge teach. Those with compassion care. Such a Church does not merely have ministers. Such a Church becomes a ministry. The greatest question is therefore not, “How many ministers does our Church have?” The deeper question is, “How many members understand that Christ has called them to ministry?” Let us hear again the words of Jesus: “I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last.” Christ has chosen us. Christ has called us. Christ has gifted us. Christ has sent us. We are not merely members of the Church. We are ministers in the Body of Christ. May the Holy Spirit awaken every member, every family, every congregation, and every generation to discover its calling and to serve Christ faithfully. And may the Church become what Christ intended it to be - not a congregation of spectators, but a community of servants; not merely a gathering of believers, but a fellowship of ministers; not simply a Church that receives God’s grace, but a Church that carries God’s grace to the world. Every member is a minister, because every believer has been called by Christ to love, serve, and bear fruit.

Amen.