

Pumping our own gas. Assembling our own furniture. Booking our own travel. All of these activities can be considered Shadow work. In years past, other people used to do this work for us for pay. But now we do it ourselves, for free. A man named Craig Lambert has written a fascinating book called *Shadow Work: The Unpaid, Unseen Jobs That Fill Your Day*. Clearly, these efforts take up time. Lots of time.

Shadow work also includes new duties at our offices, which are constantly being downsized. At home, we go to the Internet for guidance on our medical problems, and we spend countless hours coordinating our kids' extracurricular activities. Over the past two decades, as technology has taken off, new tasks have been crammed into our already full to-do lists.

Sure, some might say that “a do it yourself approach” is empowering. But Lambert urges us to look at the consequences of all this "shadow work" or self-service we are engaged in. In fact, Shadow work makes us not just busier, but exhausted and isolated, because it often leads us to interact more with our screens than with other humans. And often times we are doing it at unreasonable hours. But before we can hope to rebalance our time, we had better first understand how we actually spend it." Which begs the question, how are you actually spending your time? More than likely a lot of it is devoted to shadow work.

An article found in the *Harvard Business Review* with the title: "Are you proud of how you're spending your time," urges us to stop doing what seems to be the most urgent, and "start intentionally investing in what's most important." For example: There's a difference between what is most urgent and what is most important. Answering that email, for example, is really not as important as attending your child's soccer game.

In fact, I'm sure we can all agree that it's easy to lose track of who we are, what we enjoy, where we are in life, and where we are going, unless we purposely and intentionally take time to reflect. And apparently the apostle Paul has the very same concern in our second lesson this morning, which is why he writes the Christians in Corinth about the gifts of the Spirit. He wants them to be proud of how they are spending their time, and to make sure that they're focusing on the "Spirit work" that they can accomplish as members of the body of Christ.

Apparently, one of the dangers of shadow work is that it distracts us from Spirit work. "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed," writes Paul. "You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak." Amazing, isn't it, how the truths of the Bible can leap the centuries and speak to us exactly where we are at now! We are still "enticed and led astray" -- maybe not by Greco-Roman idols, but

by emails, text messages, phone apps, social media, and websites. Like the Christians of Corinth, we focus more on what is urgent than on what is important!

"Now there are varieties of gifts," says Paul, "but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." Notice that Paul is not saying that Spirit work is limited to a single gift, service, or activity. No, there are varieties of gifts, services, and activities. What unites this distinctive kind of work is that it all comes to us from the same divine source.

And what source is that you may be wondering? To each of us "is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." In other words, Spirit work comes from our one God -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And it serves the common good. And when we grasp this, when we truly understand this, we move from shadow-work to Spirit work. Which might lead us to wonder what that type of work looks like? Paul says that "to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit."

New Testament scholar C.K. Barrett suggests that the "the utterance of wisdom" might deal with ethical matters while "the utterance of knowledge" includes theological matters. Ethics talks about what we should do, while theology talks about what we should believe – so in other words both doing and believing are important work, and both serve the common good. The famous singer Johnny

Cash picked up on this important balance when he warned people not to be "so heavenly minded" that they're "no earthly good."

Our actions need to support our beliefs -- otherwise, people will rightly accuse us of being hypocrites. - We cannot just say we love our neighbors; We must actually perform acts of love. - We cannot simply believe in forgiveness; We must actually forgive those who hurt us. - We cannot only talk about justice; We have to do and seek justice for those in this world who are desperately seeking it!

A couple of years ago Thom Schultz, the founder of Group Publishing, had been wondering why people don't want to go to church anymore. Instead of just reading about the topic, he staked out a spot in a city park, and he asked people why they weren't in church. One of the top responses he got was, "They're a bunch of hypocrites." Clearly, no one wants to go to a church where people say one thing and then do another. But Schultz dug deeper and discovered there was more to this response. He says, "What bothered them the most was the sense that church people act like they have all the answers. That they've arrived. That they're only interested in telling others what to do."

People these days aren't always impressed by "the utterance of knowledge" – or theological insights that support our Christian faith. In fact, often times they are turned off by individuals who act like they have all the answers, and who try to tell others what to do. If we are going to attract people to the church, we need to

act in ethical ways, and support what the apostle Paul calls "the utterance of wisdom." That's real, solid, down-to-earth wisdom. Such wisdom is grounded in concrete actions that give people an experience of the love of God.

The fact of the matter, is that sadly most people "don't always experience God at church," according to Mr. Schultz. "They're not looking for deep theological trivia that seems to interest most pastors, theologians, and lifetime church goers. They crave something very simple. They're dying to be reassured that God is real, that he is more than a historical figure, that he is present today and that he is active in the lives of the people around them."

Thankfully Spirit work assures people that God is real! Through simple actions, it shows people that God is present in the lives of the members of a Christian community. Within the church, some are given "gifts of healing by the one Spirit," says Paul, "to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." This list describes a variety of skill sets, or gifts, that are in the believer's toolbox. The skills range from healing to the interpretation of spiritual languages. The point...is **not** that any one of these gifts is superior to the others, but that "all these are activated by one and the same Spirit," says Paul, "who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses."

Of course, sometimes the scale of these gifts is very small. A man named David Brooks, a columnist for *The New York Times* once asked his readers to describe their purpose in life and how they found it. One of them, Kim Spencer, wrote, "My purpose is simply to be the person ... who can pick up the phone and give you 30 minutes in your time of crisis ... I can listen to you complain about your co-workers ... I can look you in the eye and give you a few dollars in the parking lot ... I can help keep you afloat with a little boost of encouragement." That's Spirit work – it's something that would fit under Paul's categories of healing, discernment of spirits, maybe even the working of miracles. It serves the common good and it builds up Christian community.

Our challenge, our take home for today, if you will, is to clear away our Shadow work so that the gifts of the Spirit can be put to use. We can begin by turning off our screens, once and a while, and turning toward each other instead. It's only when we look each other in the eye, and engage in real conversation, that we can show each other the love of God. This might not seem to be the most urgent of work, but it is usually the most important.

The good news about Spirit work is that it energizes us and connects us to one another. Instead of feeling exhaustion and isolation, we begin to experience inspiration, community, and unity. We discover the truth of what Paul says to the

Corinthians, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

Energy. Connection. Inspiration. Community. Unity. These are the benefits of replacing shadow work with Spirit work. So, let's continue to move from Shadow to Spirit, replacing the earthly with the heavenly, and the urgent with the important. When we do this, we will find ourselves closer to God, closer to Jesus, closer to each other, and better able to serve the common good. And that is definitely time well spent. Amen.