

## “Gifts Come from All of Me, Says God

### 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

In our second lesson from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, there is a key passage for our Time and Talent Sunday. St. Paul writes . . . <sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

The source of gifts is the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of gifts is service, and the model of servanthood is Jesus.

Gifts are actions, and God is the initiator of these actions.

Your gifts, your talents come from “all of God” – the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and God the Creator. Gifts are practical actions to build up the body of Christ, to build up the church, like the practical actions listed on your spiritual gifts sheet in your bulletin. There is no such thing as a passive spiritual gift.

Once a year, why do we designate a Sunday to choose how we’re going to use our spiritual gifts in the coming year?

First, we do not use our spiritual gifts to enrich ourselves. This does not mean that individuals are not enriched, but that self-enrichment is not the primary purpose for using our God-given gifts.

Second, spiritual gifts are not for self-glorification or for gaining attention. The glory is always God’s and often that means it is a quiet, behind the scenes kind of glory.

Third, spiritual gifts are not for entertainment or showing off.

Not for self-enhancement, not for self-glorification, not for entertainment. So what are spiritual gifts for, then?

The Monday evening and Wednesday morning spiritual gifts classes that finished last month, learned this definition of spiritual gifts: “Spiritual gifts are unique endowments from the Holy Spirit, generously shared with Christians in community for building up the body of Christ in practical ways.”

1 Corinthians 12:7 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

1 Peter 4:10 says, “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.”

“For the common good,” Paul wrote “Serve one another,” said Peter. Not much left to the imagination here - spiritual gifts are for the good of others, for serving others.

Gifted people using their gifts leave edified people in their wakes. To “edify” is to build up, empowering and enabling others to be more of who God made them to be. What is the measure of a gifted teacher of the faith? It is not how dynamic the teacher is, or the opinion of other teachers. The measure of a gifted teacher is in his or her students. Are the students learning? Are the students educated? What is the measure of a gifted leader? It is not so much what the leader does, but what those who are led do. And what is the measure of someone gifted in faith? It is not how many mountains that person moves, but

how contagious his or her faith is.

Gifted people using their gifts leave empowered people in their wakes. You know that spiritual gifts are being used when you encounter people who have been empowered and energized by others who are gifted.

I think of the Clifford Smith concert, the Sunday after Thanksgiving which became one of the most spirit-filled worship experiences we've had here in Divinity. After Ed Pabst broke the ice by openly sharing his feelings and experiences with cancer, 14 others followed during the four interludes as you were moved to share. It was a tear-filled and Spirit-filled sanctuary as people were empowered and energized to publicly share what they had never shared before as we strengthened one another in our grieving and in our healing.

I think of our ministry with our sister parish, Redeemer Lutheran in Cleveland, that began with serving a hot meal the second Sunday of the month, then staffing a week of vacation Bible school, the giving tree, collecting socks, Love One Another Sunday, and other ministries at the Crisis Center as more people begin to use their gifts in building up the body of Christ.

There are many other Divinity ministries in which gifted people are using their gifts.

For many congregations, it is a weary few - the pastor, other staff, and some nucleus of dedicated and probably overworked individuals – who do the work of the church while the remaining members watch. The image that comes is of a cruise ship, with it's crew

dedicated to the pleasure of the passengers – not what the church was intended to be. The church is more like a freighter carrying God’s message, with all the crew involved in it’s work.

Christianity is not a spectator sport. It is a participant sport. There are no benchwarmers on God’s team, and there are no spectators looking on from the stands. Every Christian needs to be on the field, playing a vital position on the team.

In verses 8-10, St. Paul lists some of the gifts that were recognized and valued in the first century church. <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>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.

A 21<sup>st</sup> century Divinity writer might write: “To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of teaching a Sunday School class, to another the knowledge of the boiler and electrical systems, to another faith that the computers will remain virus free, to another gifts of healing and praying and bringing Holy Communion to our hospitalized and shut-ins, to another the working of miracles on the organ, in the choir loft, at the guitar or microphone, or in the sound booth, to another prophesying for the finance committee and planning council, to another the discernment of welcoming a visitor when it may be a member or the interpretation of tongues of a teenager who says “that’s just evil” when he means according to 1970's tongues, “that’s really cool.”

Over time, all these gifts are necessary for the effective functioning of the body of Christ. Paul emphasizes that gifts are for different functions. All the functions are necessary for the body to live and thrive. Later in 1 Corinthians 12:21-22, Paul wrote . . .  
<sup>21</sup>The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

The gifts God has given you are for different functions. All the functions are necessary for the body to live and thrive. All the functions listed on this Divinity ministry selection form are necessary for this body to live and thrive. The volunteers who come in to assemble the weekly bulletins and monthly Digest are just as necessary as those who pray with me every Sunday morning in the chapel before 9:00 worship. If one of these ministries goes unchecked, it negatively affects the functioning of the whole body. So let's take a few moments to fill out this sheet together so you can bring it forward as your offering of time and talent during the offering.

Now may the peace of God . . .

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