

## WHAT THE HECK IS A SPIRITUAL GIFT?

January 17, 2010

Ladner United Church – 0900 and 1100hrs

Preacher: JIM SHORT

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### **1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

12:2 You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.

12:3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;

12:5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;

12:6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

12:8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,

12:9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

12:10 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.

12:11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

### **John 2:1-11**

2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

2:2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

2:3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

2:4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

2:5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

2:6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

2:7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

2:8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it.

2:9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom

2:10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."

2:11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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Upon our minds this week is the disasterous results of the earthquake in Hati - unimaginable in its magnitude both in terms of death and the destruction of the infastructure of what is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere...

I decided that it would not change my sermon topic – because what I had planned on talking about today relates to our response to this event in Hati and our response to the world...

to the “cosmos” – the Greek word – the world God both created, loves and longs to have both a relationship with and for it to reflect God’s image...

Hati has lifted directly into our face horrific devestation and we want to respond with what we can give which would be most helpful – money...

We also know that the daily needs of the larger world beyond North American/Western Europe are always thus...

and always on our consciousness – no matter what we do or don’t do about it...

Helping the people of our world who are impoverished is not a sprint...as our response to Hati may be – it will be in our eyes for a while until the news moves on despite the fact that re-building Hati will take years...

Like all the issues of the world in which we live... – it’s a Marathon...

our young people down in the Eastside this morning are participating in the marathon of trying to change a community in our own midst with profound social issues...this is not the first time they have gone nor will it be the last...

with that in mind...we’ll stay the course this morning – having shared with you information about how you might donate through the United Church’s fund as well as our continued prayers....

What we will look at it the question of spiritual gifts? Because between our sense of inner faith – our inner spiritual relationship to God and the mission we have as Christians...stand our gifts and they connect those two realities and are how we do the work of the church and fulfill our live’s purpose

I like the way that Rick Warren from Saddleback Church says it in his book – A Purpose Driven Life...page 227

“You were put on earth to make a contribution. You weren’t created just to consume resources – to eat, breath and take up space. God designed you to make a difference with your life. While many best-selling books offer advice on how to “get” the most out of life, that’s not the reason God made you. You were created to add to life on earth, not just take from it. God wants to give you something back. This is God’s fourth purpose for your life (the other three –

- planned for God’s pleasure
- formed for God’s family
- created to be like Christ
- shaped for serving God
- made for a mission)

and it is called your “ministry” or service. ...

Serving is against our natural inclination (page 231) Most of the time we are interested in “serve us” not service. We say “I’m looking for a church that meets my needs and blesses me.” not “I’m looking for a place to serve and be a blessing...as we mature in Christ, the focus of our lives should increasingly shift to living a life of service. The mature follower of Jesus stps asking, “Whose going to meet my needs?” and starts asking, “Whose needs can I meet/”

what matters about your life is not duration but donation...

What a way to look at your life... a donation...

that donation is a combination of how your relationship to God is lived out...by excercising your spiritual gifts – your life is a donation in all the spheres of your life...

family/community

work/school

larger world...with children, at home, whether your married or whatever form of family you are in...

and to understand something about spiritual gifts – we are going to explore the themes of from the New Testament Book of Corinthians...

which is actually a letter written by Paul – an early church leader to group of Christians meeting in Corinth who had written him a letter...seeking his advice on some of the problems they had in their communal life...

This is his response...

## SIDEBAR – CORINTH AND THE CORINTHIAN LETTER IN THE TIME OF THE EARLY CHURCH

**AUTHOR:** PAUL, the apostle (**1:1; 16:21**)

**PLACE OF WRITING:** EPHESUS (**16:8**)

**TIME OF WRITING:** Probably in the spring of 57 A.D., shortly before the Jewish feast of Pentecost (**16:8**), during his third missionary journey ([Ac 19:1-41](#)).

**BACKGROUND OF THE CITY OF CORINTH:** Corinth was situated on the Isthmus of Greece (called Achaia in the Bible) between the Ionian Sea and the Aegean Sea, above the Mediterranean Sea. About 50 miles to the east was the city of Athens.

The Corinth of Paul's day was relatively new. The old Corinth (which was famous and powerful in the days of the Peloponnesian War) was burned in 146 B.C. by the Roman proconsul, L. Mummius. Because it was a city devoted to the gods, a hundred years were required to pass before the city could be rebuilt. In 46 B.C., Julius Caesar rebuilt the city, populated it with a colony of veterans and freedmen, and named it Julia Corinthus. It soon became a very important commercial center.

With a population of 400,000 and being a prominent center of commerce in the Mediterranean world, it was a place for all sorts of vice. An example of its immorality was found in the temple of Venus (Aphrodite), which hosted 1000 priestesses dedicated to prostitution in the name of

religion. The city's close proximity to the city of Athens probably added the problem of intellectualism. As noticed in the epistle, such an environment had its effect upon the church in Corinth. It is amazing that a church existed at all in such a city.

**BACKGROUND OF THE CHURCH AT CORINTH:** The establishment of the church occurred during Paul's second missionary journey. It is recorded by Luke in [Ac 18:1-18](#), which can be divided into three sections:

- 1) Abiding with Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers; reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath ([Ac 18:1-6](#)).
- 2) In the house of Justus, abiding there and teaching for a year and six months ([Ac 18:7-11](#)).
- 3) An incident before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia ([Ac 18:12-18](#)).

It appears from reading the epistle that the church was adversely affected by the immoral environment found in the city. Pride caused division in the church and disruption in the services (**1Co 1-4, 11**). Immorality and immodesty found its way into the church, which gave it a bad reputation (**1Co 5**). The brethren were taking their personal problems with each other before the heathen courts instead of working them out among themselves (**1Co 6**). Other issues affecting the church included questions about marriage (**1Co 7**), meats sacrificed to idols (**1Co 8-10**), women praying and prophesying with heads uncovered (**1Co 11**), the use of spiritual gifts (**1Co 12-14**), the resurrection from the dead (**1Co 15**), and the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (**1Co 16**). Thus the church was one beset with problems and questions that needed to be answered.

**PURPOSE OF WRITING:** The bad news concerning the problems at Corinth had reached Paul in Ephesus. It seems that this news came from at least two sources: 1) the household of Chloe (**1:11**); and 2) a letter sent to him (**7:1**), possibly by the hands of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (**16:17**).

[www.ccel.org/contrib/exec\\_outlines/1co/1co\\_00.htm](http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/1co/1co_00.htm)

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What raises the question of spiritual gifts is a report to Paul about how some people are using the spiritual gift of "speaking in tongues" with in the church

–Tongues which Paul identifies as one of the spiritual gifts – given a message from God in a different tongue that is spoken by the receiver outloud and then interpreted by someone else in a worship service...

A few folks are using their gifts of tongues to push their way into and solidify their leadership positions in the congregation...and in doing so are suggesting that this particular gift makes them superior to everyone else...better qualified and others...

And if you cannot exercise this particular gift – then you are some form of an inferior or second class citizen...

Their actions and attitudes causes no small amount of difficulty for the community of Christians gathering in Corinth...and they have started fighting amongst themselves...and that fighting has taken their attention from the mission Paul has articulated for them and has become a poor witness to others who might be thinking of following Jesus

If you have been around churches – you will know there's no fight like a church fight – it turns people's attentions inward – it's about as healthy as an ingrown toenail and causes incredible hurt and division...friends stop talking to each other

Paul's response is to use this conflict as a teaching opportunity...

Paul's response is this: (Breaking the Word Year C Vol 1 – page 254 ff)

- a) The first thing he does is really powerful I – he does not seek to discredit the people who are speaking in tongues...this is important to note because human nature being such – when we get into a fight – it gets personal
- Often when we think someone is acting in a way that we believe to be above them or climbing to the top of the power grid – our first inclination is to smack them down and put them in their place...
- b) Having drawn attention away from the individuals he puts it back upon the issues of gifts
- he speaks about “gifts” – Greek word is charismata
- (we mistakenly use the term charismatic to speak of someone or some church where worship is outward, loud, vocal, outrageous – its not what the word means... – Paul uses this term differently)
- c) The source of any spiritual gift – charismata is always Holy Spirit of God – its God’s gift to us – planted by God within us
- ...so our piety, our spirituality is NOT some kind of “innate human capacity waiting to be activated by a little individual effort” on our part...
- d) There is then a huge variety of spiritual gifts – suggesting to the Corinthians that speaking in tongues is not the only one nor the best one nor the most superior one
- e) ...Paul gives in his letters various lists of spiritual gifts that are different and not all spiritual gifts are the flashy extraverted kind...Paul uses these

Beautiful words – there are a variety of activities, gifts and service...

Quote p. 257 – Breaking the Word Vol 1 Year C

“Paul’s use of three different words – gifts, services and activities – does, however, point us toward the latter part of the chapter where the gifts of the Spirit will include not just the so-called charismatic gaffs of verses 8-10 – but all the more ordinary gifts that we might otherwise think of as everyday skills, such as teaching, leading, and helping others. These, along with many gifts mentioned elsewhere in scripture (e.g. generosity, compassion, evangelism, mercy, administration, encouragement, service, mercy, hospitality, worship and prayer) are the practical gifts of the Spirit that under gird the life of the church and the world.”

- f) All Christians – all people who have confessed “Jesus as Lord” – opened they to God’s Grace receive spiritual gifts - they do not come to just an elect few in the church or some kind of spiritual heroes...

That’s radically different than how we use the term “gifted” and I know that...

all the cousins on my father’s side got A’s and were accelerated – they were gifted in the language of our family growing up and I – who got C’s and was dragged through the first 8 grades was considered if not very average – somewhat stupid...

in our world gifted people means the ability that lifts an individual above the rank and file – implying they are better, smarter and more likely to achieve success...and we tend to affirm only certain or better gifts – they tend to be around brains, athletic skills, or leadership...

That’s why when we talk about hospitals and medical care – we talk about doctors and nurses – and we forget about all the other people including cleaners, cooks, etc

Paul is talking about something counter to that – in his language – everyone in the church – not matter who – is gifted...

- g) The gifts have a specific purpose – they are not given for and I quote “an individual’s own private spiritual delectation, the cultivation of private emotional highs, mystical thrills or an exclusive individual serenity. Christianity is not a religion of spiritual lone rangers or narcissists.

They are given by the Holy Spirit to be used within the community for the “common good” of the community and the world.

Gifts are validated or discerned by the fruit they bear – what results do they bring – do they edify, grow, bless, enrich – the common good...and in the letter to the Ephesians (Ephesus where Paul was when he wrote Corinthians) where

**Galatians 5:22-23 (New International Version)**

<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
<sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

All of this is important because it impacts the life of the church and our church...

If our church life is shaped by a cultural sense of giftedness

We'll see a few people as gifted – they will be the most visible gifts  
And everyone else – whose gifts may not be so obvious, will feel there is no place for them and take a back seat – perhaps feeling inferior...

A church Paul says to the Corinthians is a community of people

Who confess the supremacy and priority of their relationship to God through Jesus Christ...

Who by the Spirit of God...  
Each is given “spiritual gifts”

To exercise for the common good...

Everyone has been given “spiritual gifts”

Not just Jim

Or the people on the Leadership Council...

Or the person who teaches in the church school

Or who reads the scriptures on a Sunday or who leads the prayers...

And those gifts are not used – just within the church community but beyond...

When Paul talks about the varieties of gifts – the word is better translated dispersals...

In this church of Ladner United Church – the Spirit has dispersed...

Among all the people who make up this church

Spiritual gifts

All the gifts we need to do the ministry God has called us to as Jesus' disciples  
Are scattered and dispersed within the people who worship in this church

so we don't always need "more" – rather we need to use what is ready here – to  
help each other identify those – because we cannot always see well ourselves...

To pray for each other...and then to risk using them...

Prayer posted on the internet on January 1, 2010

By Quinn G. Caldwell, Associate Minister of Old South Church, Boston MA

"God, I thank you that you are God and I am not. Help me to trust that you are  
saving the world even as we speak, and give me the grace and the resolve to  
play my small part in it. AMEN.

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