

Spiritual Gifts: We All Have Them, Let's Use Them

1 Corinthians 12:1-11
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
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I'd like for us to reflect this day on the notion of spiritual gifts: What are they? How do we get them? How do we put them into practice? Let me say right from the start, you'll get a somewhat different answer from a conservative evangelical pastor than you will from a progressive one. So, let's start with the basics. Let's start with the Bible, which is a very Presbyterian thing to do, regardless of where one finds oneself on the theological spectrum.

Liturgically, this is a timely reflection. Last week was Baptism of the Lord Sunday (of which you would have had to watch on our YouTube channel, "College Hill Presbyterian Church Tulsa", because I videoed it here in an empty sanctuary). We explored how the meaning of our baptism serves *both* as a sign that we are a valued and beloved member of the family of God, and that we are called for service to further the ways of God in our lives and in the world. To put it more succinctly, **our baptism serves to give us our identity and our mission, just as it did for Jesus.** Through our baptism, therefore, the call to continue the ministries begun by Jesus extends to each and every one of us, not just to those ordained and installed into positions of church leadership. Yet, we will certainly apply this to the Ordination & Installation of the four incoming Ruling Elders to serve on our Session later in this service of worship.

Today's Epistle Reading from the apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthian community of faith serves to further this understanding of identity and mission. Paul does this through a discussion of what he calls '**spiritual gifts,**' or '**manifestations of the Spirit**'. You may remember that the word 'manifestation' is the English translation of the Greek word *epiphany*. So, this is a great fit for this liturgical season of Epiphany.

If I were to ask each of you to reflect upon and list your spiritual gifts, what would that list contain? While some might wonder, "I'm not quite sure," Paul wants us to realize that **ultimately no one's list would be empty – because each of us has been gifted by God.** Perhaps Paul's most important point is **why** each one of us is blessed with a variety of spiritual gifts and talents. Chapter 12, verse 7 plainly states, "**To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**" This is reflected in the title of this sermon, "Spiritual Gifts: We All Have Them, Let's Use Them."

Paul goes on to present a **list of spiritual gifts**, including: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, discernment, and various kinds of tongues or the ability to interpret those tongues. Interestingly, there are other lists that occur elsewhere in different letters from Paul. He mentions in Romans 12, for example, other gifts of the Spirit, including some very concrete things, such as: serving, teaching, encouragement,

giving, generosity, hospitality, leadership, diligence, mercy, administration. Another one of his lists includes various church leadership roles like apostle, evangelist, and preacher.

In my opinion, however, Paul missed listing some very important gifts, like the ability to fix things, like the sanctuary heater, and technological skills and computer knowledge. And what about the gift of those able to provide live streaming?

What do you suppose was the underlying issue to which Paul was addressing? In a nutshell, it was about **finding unity** within the congregation, and becoming all that community of faith could become. Biblical scholars surmise there was an enormous amount of **diversity** in that ancient congregation, and it was often expressed through dissention, division, factions, cliques, and power struggles. These are not uncommon in organized religion today. When Paul emphasizes that each one of us in a community of faith is gifted in a different manner, he intends to **counteract self-centeredness and the human tendency to compare ourselves to others in a competitive, envious, and even judgmental way**. For when that happens, it's not a big step away from prideful arrogance, including spiritual arrogance, and sense of superiority and privilege over others. **Or, the opposite happens, which perhaps worse, a growing sense of being inferior and having nothing worth sharing.**

We are not meant to see our differing gifts, therefore, in a hierarchical fashion, but simply as different gifts for different purposes and functions within the community of faith. Preaching, for instance, is not a greater spiritual gift than the ability to manage finances, or prepare a meal for someone in need, or sing in the choir, or teach our children and adults, or greet visitors, or be willing to climb a ladder to change a lightbulb, or any other of the countless necessities of effectively being the church.

It cannot be overemphasized how we are to **think of our giftedness by God not for our individual glory, but for the common good!** And yes, that's harder to do in our Western Culture that idolizes individualism compared to those that truly value and **understand the commonality needed to live together in authentic community. That's one of our primary goals here at College Hill.** Therefore, since working for the common good is the goal of using our gifts and talents, then an obvious correlation is that **if we are not sharing our gifts and abilities with the community of faith, and in our daily lives, then our 'common good' isn't as good as it could be.** Ministry, we must constantly remind ourselves, is everyone's responsibility. That's part of the **cost of discipleship.** That's why we include in our bulletin of worship every Sunday, "Ministers: All the members of the congregation!"

Again, notice how Paul connects spirituality and spiritual gifts with very *concrete* things, things that are necessary to function as a relevant and productive community of faith. For this keeps us from developing some sort of **hierarchy based on who's "got the Spirit" and who doesn't. Spoiler alert, we all do.** We come to realize, as biblical commentator Raewynne Whiteley puts it, "**Gifts are not merit badges for holiness or a sign of approval from God, but God's response to the needs of our communities.**"

How, then, can the full range of gifts exhibited by the total membership of this congregation be recognized, encouraged, valued, supported, and welcomed into the service of Christ in and through our ministry together – to each other, in our families, our neighborhoods, and in the world? So, please take the following to heart and reflect upon how you can incorporate your gifts by perhaps serving on one of our ministry teams this year. You will be joyfully welcomed to join them in their particular ministry efforts:

- If your gift is wisdom, we need it.
- If it is knowledge, we need it.
- If it is teaching, we need it.
- If it is administration, we need it.
- If it is with music or the arts, we need it.
- If it is in prayer, we need it.
- If it is in public speaking, we need it.
- If it is in compassion, we need it.
- If it is in hospitality, we need it.
- If it is in generosity, we need it.
- If it is in technology, we need it.
- If it is in the use of tools or working with your hands, we need it.
- If it is in **[fill in the blank with your gifts and your passions]**, we need it to build up our community of faith in this time and place.

This passage of scripture teaches us that **our gifts, talents, and abilities aren't accidental, nor are our passion and energy for specific tasks just happenstance.** For as Karen Stokes summarizes, "Paul's words offer a refreshing, even shocking reminder that **faith, while personal, is never private, and that the gift each person has been given is meant to be shared.**" Let us share generously with one another!

One of the things we can share with the larger Tulsa community, as College Hill Presbyterian Church, is working to fulfill the third point in our Mission Statement: "**Reach out with a compassionate voice for peace and justice**", also printed weekly in our worship bulletin. And in recognition of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday this weekend, we would be remiss if we didn't **speak out against the racial injustices that continue to haunt this city, this state, this country, and indeed the world.** Martin Luther King, Jr. was a remarkably gifted leader, who among others, influenced to this day what it means to grow and live into, using his words, a beloved community. May we all reflect upon that tomorrow and beyond.

May we also be intentional about discovering and sharing our own Spirit-given gifts. For College Hill, as a community of faith, is blessed and gifted in so many ways. Just look around you, and look at yourself. Yet, as part of the body of Christ, **it takes all of us sharing together our particular gifts to live into the fullness that this community of faith can be and become.**

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Spiritual Gifts: We All Have Them, Let's Use Them.

Amen.

Resources:

Feasting on the Word Commentary