

“GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT: EVERYBODY’S GOT ONE” I PETER 4: 7-11

I am beginning today a five-part sermon series on THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT. It is language that often makes some Presbyterians nervous when one talks about the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. It often is hard, if not difficult, for Presbyterians to remain in control whenever we hear language about the Holy Spirit. For we know scripture well enough that the Spirit will blow where and how the Spirit will blow. Kind of like the wind - - we know it is there and yet we cannot control it. Makes us nervous. So, I hope this series will calm our anxieties about the Holy Spirit as well as give us permission to allow the Holy Spirit to be turned loose in our worlds.

Another reason for this series is because of what you did last Sunday. You called your next installed pastor, Rev. Laura Sugg. To say the least, it was a big day and an exciting one for the congregation. And yet the work has just begun. We have two and a half months to prepare for Laura and Naomi’s arrival. So my series is an effort - - an intentional one - - to prepare us individually in the congregation. To raise the question of what each of us has to offer and what will we contribute? It truly is a new day, and you are invited to consider some new ways to be involved in the life of South Plains Church. You do not have an option to be involved, but you do have an option of how you will be involved.

The idea for this series came from our Lenten Study which 8-12 people did for five Wednesday nights during Lent. We all passed. We learned a good bit about spiritual gifts and about the gifts we possess. It was a helpful study and it seemed to me appropriate in our preparation time for the new pastor.

In fact, a monumental event occurred during the study. Joanne Addotta was involved... and it was her third time to go through this very same study. We all agreed she passed with flying colors, so she is finally all set!

What is a spiritual gift? I am going to use a definition which I will probably repeat each week:

Spiritual gifts are special abilities given by Christ through the Holy Spirit to empower believers for the ministries of the body.
REPEAT

I do not expect you to remember this definition in its entirety as it is full of a lot of meaning. In the series we will explore the definition from different angles.

Spiritual gifts are very narrowly focused. They are to be used through the church to empower the various ministries. They are not used in the world. They are not found in the Lion’s Club or the Kiwanis Club. They are not used in the Homeowner’s Association.

I make this point because the end result, the reason for spiritual gifts is to empower ministries, nothing else. They are used in order that ministries of Jesus Christ can occur. They are used for God’s Kingdom. They are not for our own satisfaction and pleasure. No, they are intentional and intentionally focused...to empower or build up ministries of the church.

Which means that just because you are good at administration or at hospitality or at generosity or at encouragement - - all of which are great gifts and contributions - - if they are not used to empower ministries, they are just gifts, and not spiritual gifts.

What I take from this is that I always have to ask the question, what ministry is being empowered by the spiritual gift I bring? How is that ministry able to blossom and bloom? How does my spiritual gift make a difference in the ministry?

OK, enough basis; yet I think they are critical points that have to be kept in mind as we explore the idea of spiritual gifts.

Our scripture from I Peter 4 is very helpful about Spiritual Gifts. The context is a bit different. He is talking about the end of time as there was the strong belief the Christ would return to earth and bring in God’s Kingdom. So out of that context he is talking about spiritual gifts.

Note the main point Peter makes: (1) gifts are given by God. Just as any gift, we are the recipients. We are graced by the gifts we have. We do not decide one day to go out and take a class on a particular gift and voila! We are gifted. No, spiritual gifts are from God.

What dawned on me while working on this sermon is that it is an important day in our lives when we acknowledge the gifts we have received from God. We humbly declare thanks to God that God gifted us with generosity or with encouragement or with hospitality or with administration. Yes, we are good at these things, but when we finally acknowledge they are true gifts from God, I think that is a life changer.

For making that acknowledgment is our declaration that God is our God. We stand in awe of the fact that the Creator of the world would gift me with a particular spiritual gift. That I would be endowed with a gift that could make the difference in a particular ministry of the church. That I could freely give of my gift because God has given me that gift.

It really is a spiritual moment to declare God gave me the gift. And with that gift comes an expectation that I will use it for God's Kingdom. God has such confidence in me, in you, that we received a particular spiritual gift because God knew we could do it!

It is a humbling time to think I might be able to make a difference. I might have something to contribute. I might be able to share some of the joy which I have found in my life.

So, #1, Spiritual Gifts are from God.

#2 Is that everyone receives a gift.

Verse 10, "as each has received a gift, employ it for one another as good stewards of God's grace."

Everyone one of us has a gift. A fun part of the Lenten Study was to take two different tests. We learned about our spiritual gifts - - or working gifts which we are currently using. We also learned about our waiting gifts – those gifts which God could be calling us to try out.

For the gifts God gives us are not just one time and done. No, as we grow in our faith, gifts begin to change, and we find ourselves with new gifts which can really surprise us.

I do think this second point is one we often deny. You know we talk about children who have low self-esteem. They don't think they are worth anything. They are not good enough. They don't count!

I think we often have low self-esteem in relationship to our spiritual gifts. It is often heard around the church, "Oh, I cannot do that!" "I don't have anything to contribute." "Get someone else who is much better than I am."

We offer all kinds of excuses and some are legitimate. Yet many are said to avoid doing something! Many are said not to get involved. Many are said because we don't agree with what is going on.

Yet scripture declares, "each has received a gift." Every one of us who profess Jesus Christ as Lord has received a gift or gifts. Claim it. Affirm it. Use the gift. For as with anything we have, without discipline to use it, we lose what we had!

One final thought which I find powerful, "employ the gift as a good steward of God's grace." In other words, the gift is not used as you would use your computer...or as you would use your cell phone. Employing your gift means to be good stewards of God's gift.

Just imagine slaving over a hot stove in the soup kitchen and wondering why would I do that? It is a lot of work...yet that work enabled a person to experience something of God's grace through a meal and fellowship.

Imagine working tirelessly for two years to find a pastor, all those PNC meetings and phone calls and prayer times were used to steward God's grace resulting in the calling of a new pastor.

Imagine all the hours that Betsy, Chad, and others put in doing the financial ministry of the congregation. Yet their efforts and work enabled this congregation to be good stewards of God's grace for two food banks.

Imagine the hours Angela puts in with choir members who are making a joyful noise and Angela just likes to tune just a bit...and Palm Sunday worship concluded with "Were You There?" which touched people with God's grace and a few tears.

Imagine the hours Joanne and the Worship committee expend on our worship experiences including a 'drive-through' imposition of Ashes to which a person experienced God's grace because of a comment Bill Eastwood made that day while volunteering at Martha Jefferson Hospital.

Go figure folks! The gifts of the Spirit are loose on the world. Each of us has them because God gave them to us.

If I could, I would give you a sermon homework assignment this week. I would ask each person to identify one or two Spiritual Gifts God has given you. And then to create a booklet with this compilation of these spiritual gifts to be presented to Laura on her first day as pastor. It would be a mind-blowing gift for a new pastor. And would set the stage for his new era at SPPC. Where the Spirit would be turned loose, and things would begin to happen, we cannot begin to imagine.

What a gift!

What a Spiritual Gift!

What a new day!