

*Knowing and Living into*

*our*

*Spiritual Gifts*

*God's Gifts for you and the Church*

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## **Table of Contents**

**Introduction**

**Chapter One**                      **A Short History of the Holy Spirit**                      **page 4**

**Chapter Two**                      **The Gifts of the Holy Spirit**                      **page 11**

**Chapter Three**                      **Spiritual Gifts Inventory**                      **page 14**

**Chapter Four**                      **Understanding Our Gifts**                      **page 21**

**Chapter Five**                      **Organizing for Church by our Gifts**                      **page 63**

**Chapter Six**                      **The Most Excellent Way**                      **page 67**

## Introduction

*Not by might, not by power but by the Spirit of God*

As Christians, we are part of a movement that seeks to draw all people into the gracious, reconciling love of God through Jesus Christ. It is Christ's call on our lives to know Him, to make Him known and in the process draw everyone into the life that is really life, the life lived with God and for the welfare of others and ourselves.

Too often our Christianity is quiet, personal, merely a part of our lives. We tend to focus on our relationship with God, on our prayer life, on our call, on our experience of God. This is a wonderful and important part of the Christian life, but since no one can be a Christian on their own, it is important that we remember that we are part of a community and a specific kind of community at that. Jesus wants us to be known by our love for one another and so Christian community seeks both a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with others. That's part of what church is about – the shared connection to God and the shared connection to others.

But given the goings on in the world, the turmoil around us and Jesus' command to make disciples of all people, God wants more from us as persons and more from us as the Church. We have a tendency to major in the minors – arguing with one another over doctrine and sociology and sexuality, when the world is crying out for the hope of God in Jesus Christ and a just society that trumps all of our theological and sociological niceties. We have a tendency toward a social justice activism that is disconnected from our call to live as Christians and tell the story. Social activism and work for social justice is an important call on our lives, but not one disconnected from living and talking about the Gospel and about Jesus' invitation to a life that is really life. And, since no one else will do this for us, we have a pressing and urgent opportunity to be a people touched by God who reach out to others in Christ's name for their spiritual and physical health.

Thankfully, we do not have to accomplish all of this on our own: a personal relationship with God, a thriving Christian community, and a world changed into God's dream. We have a part to play, but the power and grace and change comes about through the power of God at work in us and through us. God gives us all the gifts we require to grow in our faith, to build Christian community, and to reach out to a world hungry for the Good News of God's great love.

As an Episcopal priest, I try to keep in mind the *personalness* of the life with God with the call to make disciples and grow the Church. When we get bogged down by struggles or scant resources or outright opposition to God's intentions, I often say, "Well, Jesus only wants us to change the world." That usually gets a couple of uncomfortable smiles or chuckles, but that is the task we have been given as followers of Jesus and though we will not bring about the kingdom or the reign of God on our own, we are invited to be a part of it. And the most amazing thing is that we have been given the faith and the gifts to be God's instruments in our church, in our community, and in the world.

When the Holy Spirit came into the world to stay at Pentecost, the first followers of Jesus were given a power that was beyond their natural gifts and abilities. The power came to them to help God spread the good news of Jesus Christ as individuals and as communities. As the Church grew and more people were drawn into the life with Christ and one another, the variety of gifts became apparent. The Holy Spirit gives gifts for God's purposes and there are a variety of gifts, just as there are a variety of persons. No one has all the gifts, but exercised in community, God has given us a power that transforms individual lives, transforms communities, and can transform the world.

The Holy Spirit continues to send gifts on God's people today. You have been given gifts. Your ordained leader(s) has been given gifts. Your church community has been given gifts. All these gifts have been given for our enjoyment of God and for building up a community of love and power that can assist God in transforming the world.

Early on in my ministry in a growing church, I overheard a parishioner talking with a friend in the local grocery store. She didn't see me because I was dressed like a normal person. The friend asked our parishioner how she liked the new Rector. Her answer was something along the lines that we love our new Rector and he's given us all little jobs to do. I smiled, but realized that that was exactly the vision passed on to me from St. Paul and others in my life. The Spirit gives us gifts and we exercise our gifts to build up the Body of Christ. As the church grew, I felt led to come up with some kind of spiritual gifts survey to help people know their gifts and where they might best use them because when the community exercises their gifts, then the Spirit is freer to enliven and empower the community.

And perhaps the most beautiful thing about these gifts from the Holy Spirit is that when we are exercising them, we have a renewable source of energy. Think about an activity or ministry you've been a part of that was a struggle for you. Now, think about some activity or ministry you've been a part of where you simply loved what you were doing. The results were often better than you expected and you rarely grew or grew tired of participating. In the first instance, you were or are probably doing something outside your gift set. In the second instance, you were or are living into and using these incredible gifts that God has given you. So consider your gifts and use them to God's glory and for the good of others.

This workbook is an attempt to deepen your understanding of Christ's call on your life and the gifts that come from God through the Holy Spirit. Over the course of your study, you will have an opportunity to learn or remember how the Holy Spirit moves in the lives of people like you and me. We will consider how that presence and power can help you in your Christian walk and in your ministry in your church and in the world. I have included a spiritual gifts inventory to give you some idea of just what gifts God has given you for your life and ministry as well as some explanation of what each gift is and how it has been used by others and how it may be used in your life and the life of your church.

Finally, there is the important reminder that while all these gifts and powers and abilities are magnificent, there is one gift that surpasses them all and draws them all together for

good. It is the gift that Christ revealed in His life and death and resurrection and it is the gift that reveals Christ' presence in our lives today. For if we have all kinds of gifts and abilities and programs and social justice commitments, they are nothing without love.

I hope you find this study helpful for your life with Christ and that you feel more and more empowered to exercise your gifts and to enjoy the gifts and abilities that God has given your fellow Christians. Together, God can use us to build Christian community and to make disciples of all people.

Grace and Peace.

*Frank*

The Rev. W. Frank Allen

## Chapter One

### A Short History of the Holy Spirit

#### The Holy Spirit

One of the deep mysteries of the Bible and the Christian faith concerns who God is and how we can be in relationship with Him. The concept of God is a mystery that has challenged Christians and non-Christians alike for years as we try to explain the presence and the dimensions of a limitless God. Our limited minds struggle to comprehend, much less explain one God, but three manifestations (Father-Son-Holy Spirit). Some have used the analogy of ice, water and steam being the same substance (H<sub>2</sub>O), but differing according to temperature. Others have shown how one woman can be a mother, wife and daughter all at the same time. These analogies are helpful, but if we only stay with our mind and do not experience God in our hearts and lives, then we cannot grow in faith, but will remain in a state of consternation. Put another way, we can only talk about God and can never truly describe the God who creates, redeems and empowers. We can speak of this one God, but it remains a mystery beyond our understanding to define how this is so until we experience God in our lives.

As the Father, God is our Creator, Sustainer, Provider. As the Son, God is Word, Wisdom, the Redeemer who pardons our sins and brings us into a living relationship with God now and through the door of death. As the Holy Spirit, God comes near to us, draws us to Jesus Christ, and enables us to receive Jesus into our hearts as Savior and Lord. The Trinity means that God relates to us in three specifiable ways and is at the root of the Christian understanding of who God is. How God interrelates within God is where most of us find mystery and a confusion that can lead to distraction. So we will leave that consideration for Trinity Sunday and other, more accomplished theologians than myself.

The Biblical record shows that the Holy Spirit has been active in the creation from the beginning. The Spirit was present at creation and apparent in the lives of individual people, though not all people. It actually looks as though the Spirit came and went in the lives of the community and in the lives of individuals in the record of the Old Testament. The Spirit came on persons for a time and a purpose, but then seemed to step away.

On the day of Pentecost that all changed. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus' first followers to give them a deeper knowledge of God and the ability to make God and God's love known to others. The Holy Spirit also came giving gifts to those who believe - gifts for life and gifts for giving life to others.

The Holy Spirit is God making God known in important and particular ways on our behalf and empowering us for ministry with gifts. Through the Holy Spirit we are drawn into a relationship with God and through the Spirit, we are given gifts that enliven our lives and enable us to work together as a community to share the Gospel and the Gospel life with others.

## The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The main word for *spirit* in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *ruach*. *Ruach* literally means wind or breath. Sometimes it is used to describe life in general, as in the first breath a child takes at birth. Sometimes it is used only in reference to God. When *ruach* is used in reference to God, it suggests the awesome power and energy of God in action in the creation, in this world. Sometimes this energy is specific and sometimes it is general, but it always acts in concert with the intention of God, with God's own choosing.

The creation stories in the Book of Genesis reveal that God is dynamic, active and intimately involved in the whole realm of nature. It is the Holy Spirit, the *ruach* of God, that moves over the chaos as creation begins, bringing order and bringing life in all its magnificent variety. God is not nature and God is not uninvolved. So, as Christians we do not believe in the Deist god who creates and then sits back nor do we believe that God is nature itself. God is in nature and moves in nature, but is not limited to the creation. The Creator, God, is distinct from the 'work of His hands', but is present and moving in nature.

And just as the Spirit is at work in nature, the Spirit is at work in the people of God. God created the universe in general, God created humankind specifically. Job says, "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life". (Job 33:4) God is the God of all, but also the God of you and me personally. This is the connection for all the great heroes of the faith, from Abraham and Sarah to King David, to the writing prophets. The Bible points to the reality that the Spirit is at work in our lives.

Still, the primary concern of the Spirit among God's people is to make the people righteous and to protect them from being harmed surrounding nations, physically and spiritually. So the Spirit comes upon individuals: judges, prophets, kings, women, men, and children. Sometimes the Spirit comes in raw power like Moses' staff or Samson's strength, but more often the Spirit comes as a moral force to draw the people of God to a moral or righteous life. The prophet Isaiah is particularly clear about the moral force of the Spirit (See 61:1-3) and God's revelation to the people has much to do with how they are living their lives and whether they are taking care of the least among them.

One important note about the Holy Spirit and the people of God is that it appears that the Spirit comes and goes, but never remains for a prolonged period of time. The Spirit rests on a person or persons just long enough to win the battle or just long enough to redirect the people to a closer relationship with God and then seemingly goes away and is not clearly present. The prophets in the Old Testament also speak to the promise of the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all peoples and not just a few persons now and then, but that is not reality in Old Testament times. The prophets are certain of this future hope and it is the hope that has come to us in our time through the promise of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the coming and remaining of the Holy Spirit. But for four hundred years the Spirit and the scriptures are silent.

## **The Holy Spirit in the New Testament**

Then comes Jesus of Nazareth and the silence of the Spirit is ended. The presence, power and movement of the Holy Spirit is critical to the understanding of the movement of God in a new way in Jesus of Nazareth and in the beginnings of the Church. Mention of the Spirit is present in every book of the New Testament and is the foundation of the Jesus' birth, ministry, and power beyond the cross and grave.

The Holy Spirit is dynamically at work in the birth and life of Jesus. It is the Angel Gabriel who announces to Mary that she will bear the Savior of the world, but it is the Holy Spirit who 'overshadows' her and blesses her so that she can conceive and bear the child who will save us.

When Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River by John, it is the Spirit who descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove and then sends Jesus out into the wilderness where He is tested. It may be interesting to note the difference between the Spirit's work in relation to John the Baptist and Jesus. With John, the Spirit simply carried forward the Old Testament work of preparation, like the prophets of the Old Testament. John's was a ministry of repentance of sin in order to lead a moral life and allow room for God to enter in. John understood that he was preparing the way when he said, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am unworthy to untie; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Luke 3:16) Jesus' power, apparent through the power and work of the Holy Spirit, is different than John's as we shall see.

In all four Gospels, the work of the Holy Spirit is never separated from the mission of Jesus Christ as Savior of the world. Jesus was aware of the presence of the Spirit with Him in his marvelous ministry to the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed (Luke 4:18ff) and throughout His teaching, healing, forgiving, dying and rising.

Jesus taught a great deal about the Holy Spirit. The most important teachings come from the Gospel of John, chapters 14 through 16. These are part of what we call the 'last discourses' (or the conversation at the Last Supper) and reveal some of Jesus' final teachings to His closest followers before He goes to the cross.

The disciples are told that Jesus must leave them and return to the Father, but Jesus promises not to leave them alone. In Chapter 14, Jesus tells His followers that God will send "another Counselor" (John 14:16), "even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." But this promise requires obedience to the Lord's commandments of love (again the consistent desire of the Spirit to assist us in leading the moral life). Jesus went on to say, "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:25, 26)

Jesus goes on to teach on the power of the Holy Spirit for the lives of His followers in chapter 15, but it is in chapter 16 that Jesus is most direct. Here Jesus identifies with certainty the ever-present connection between the Holy Spirit's mission and His own. In verses 7-15, Jesus explains the coming of the Spirit and how the Spirit will empower and guide them and transform the world to a knowledge and love of God. Jesus explains that His earthly ministry must be completed before the Spirit can come in its fullness and that the Spirit' unique mission is to magnify Jesus Christ in and through Jesus' followers.

Jesus also promises that power from on high will come down so that Jesus' followers can truly grasp that Jesus was the One written about in the Old Testament and that they were to remain in Jerusalem until the Spirit would come upon them. They cannot do the work and ministry He has called them to, nor can they be effective witnesses without the power from on high, without the Spirit. They do wait and we have read about and seen the result of the coming of the Spirit on their lives and community.

The mission of the Holy Spirit is to carry forward the mission of Jesus Christ and God's kingdom. For that purpose, the Spirit brings conviction of sin, assists us to repent (to turn) and to put our trust in the Savior. The Spirit helps us pray earnestly for the Kingdom or Reign of God and empowers us for mission and effective service. This mission is related to our spiritual lives, to the life of prayer, effective living, and service. As you and read the scriptures, worship, serve others and live in the world, it is the Spirit that empowers and opens our minds and hearts to God and God's purpose for our lives.

### **The Holy Spirit and Pentecost**

When Jesus ascends into heaven, He instructs His followers (disciples, apostles, take your pick) to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit before going forth to make disciples of all nations and peoples. The Book of Acts (1) shows a picture of these first followers waiting in Jerusalem, waiting and praying. Then, on the Day of Pentecost, when they were all in one place, the Holy Spirit comes upon them and the world has never been the same.

Acts 2:1-4 describes the rush of a powerful wind (remember *ruach*, the Hebrew word for the Holy Spirit means wind) comes upon them and tongues of flame seemed to dance upon their heads. The signs are interesting, but they are secondary to the power of the Holy Spirit that came upon these men and women on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit comes upon them and they begin to tell the story of Jesus' death and resurrection to Jews and Gentiles, who have gathered in Jerusalem. The Spirit gives them the power to speak in languages not their own so that all can understand the saving purpose of God in Jesus Christ. The crowds are amazed, though some thought they were drunk.

Whatever happened on that day, Jesus' followers were now empowered with something new. Where they had been afraid to admit that they even knew Jesus when he was arrested and sent to die on the cross, they now proclaimed Him boldly as the One sent by God to save the world from sin and death. They go forth from Jerusalem into all the world. It is not by their power, though. It is by the power of the Spirit working in them

and through them and in the hearts of the listeners. As I read Simon Peter's sermon in Acts 2, I don't find it particularly persuasive as a speech or sermon when 5,000 persons are converted, so there must be something more going on. That something more is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the guiding force of the early Church and not only empowers persons to believe in Jesus, but guides their worship, their common life and their actions. They were literally filled with the Holy Spirit and relied on the Spirit for their lives.

### **St. Paul and the Conversion of the Gentiles**

We don't know if Paul of Tarsus was present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. We encounter him first as the "coat check guy" at the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Paul is a Jew who studies the law and seeks to follow God with all his heart and this belief in Jesus as God's Messiah is blasphemy for him and leads him to persecute the church, to imprison and bring charges against believers in the hope of stamping out this divisive heresy. It is on a trip to Antioch to arrest Christians that Paul has an encounter with Jesus and is persuaded that Jesus is indeed God's Son. When he arrives in Antioch he is baptized and the Holy Spirit comes upon him.

Paul is God's gift to the Church, especially to non-Jews or the Gentiles. He is not only well schooled in the Old Testament or Torah, but having grown up in Tarsus, a Greek city, Paul was familiar with the writings of Plato and Aristotle and possessed a knowledge of the non-Jewish culture that make him a persuasive ambassador for Christ. But it is not Paul's natural abilities and inclinations that make him the Godly man and church planter extraordinaire, but the power of the Holy Spirit working in Him and through Him.

So it is with us. Our natural gifts are natural and may be useful to draw us to God and draw others into the sphere of God's love, but it is the Holy Spirit working in us that makes us to grow in faith and draws others into God's presence.

## Chapter Two

### The Gifts of the Spirit

Four Biblical passages deal specifically with spiritual gifts: Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:1-16; and 1 Peter 4:10, 11. Some of the gifts are common in the letters and some of the gifts show up only in specific writings. Although these letters differ in context of the experience of the Spirit, they form a unity of meaning that cements the church's two-fold ministry to itself and its ministry to the world. In these passages, listing some twenty specific spiritual gifts, including

<b>Romans 12:1-8</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 12:1-31</b>	<b>Ephesians 4:1-16</b>	<b>1 Peter 4:10, 11</b>
Prophecy	Wisdom	Apostles	Speaking
Ministry	Knowledge	<i>Prophets</i>	Serving
Teaching	Faith	Evangelists	
Exhorting	Healing	Pastors	
Giving	Miracles	<i>Teachers</i>	
Leader	<i>Prophecy</i>		
Compassion	Discernment		
Tongues	Interpretation of Tongues		

You can quickly see that the gifts relate most specifically to the life and the work of the Church, though there are some areas of crossover in daily life. These are all activities common to the Church, that is 'jobs to be done', but the Holy Spirit makes it more than merely a job, but a partnership between a person and God or between a community and God.

As we consider these gifts, we discover certain principles that help us understand the importance of the gifts.

***The gifts are for service.*** They are not for personal adornment, status, power or popularity. The gifts of the Spirit enable us to do effective service for the Body of Christ, the church, and through the church, the world.

Now the Biblical word for service is *diakonia*, and it refers to something done with *agape* love or serving, giving love (see 1 Cor. 13). 1 Peter 4:10, 11 declares that each person has received a gift that it may be employed for one another and draw us to Christ. In the first letter to the Christians in Corinth (1 Cor. 12:27) Paul says this same thing another way, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Ephesians 4:12 states that the gifts are for "building up the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are not personal property. Nor are they merely natural qualities to be used as we please, even though when we use them we experience God's pleasure. Gifts are divine energy creating, molding, directing new abilities for special ministries to the world through the Church.

***God gives and empowers the gift.*** The gifts come from God and there is nothing we can do beyond being open to the movement of the Spirit in our lives. Wanting certain gifts is a little like wanting to be taller or to have more hair. We can't do anything beyond asking and being open to the Spirit's pleasure. Romans 12:6 says, "Having gifts according to the grace *given* us . . .", and 1 Corinthians 12:6 says, "All those (gifts) are inspired by the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as God wills . . ."

We don't have to be scriptural literalists on this, but it appears to work just this way in practice and is consistent with God taking the initiative in giving gifts. God alone knows what we need for the "building up of the body of Christ" and for the "common good of the Church." (Ephesians 4:12 and 1 Corinthians 12:7). We accept the gifts from God and then look for a way to use them.

***All Christians are included in the giving of gifts.*** Everyone is gifted by God for special ministries. Some of you may say you aren't because you don't have the talent or natural abilities, but the truth is that all Christians are given spiritual gifts that carry extraordinary powers and responsibilities. And, since God knows what each community needs, God will "raise up" these gifts in people as they are needed and as people are open to the Spirit.

***Only God knows the limit to the variety of gifts.*** Because we can only count twenty or so gifts does not mean that that's all there are. At different times and in different places other gifts may arise from God to accommodate particular situations. God creates!

***The use of gifts determines health and growth.*** Paul consistently uses the metaphor of the body to describe the equality of gifts and the need for the use of all the gifts in the community of the church. The Church is a single organism made up of many parts and if the Church is going to function well and be faithful to God's call for mission in the world, it requires that all the gifts that have been given be used. It requires us all to use the gifts God has given us at the appropriate time and to enjoy the grace given when others are using their gifts, even when we have been given those very same gifts. When we use the gifts that have been given us, our gifts mature and the Church matures and deepens and reaches out in the power of love.

### **Open to the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit takes the initiative in drawing us to God and in giving us gifts for ministry within the Church and to the world. Our responsibility is to be open to the movement of the Spirit: to receive the gifts and then to use them.

Gifts are for something, not merely to have and to hold. They are to be exercised in the community for building up the community. We are rarely called to wield these gifts in ways that are beyond our comfort level and they tend to be closely associated with our personalities and abilities, but not always so. St. Paul is an evangelist. That is, the gifts God gave Paul were for the purpose of bringing Christ to the world. Being an evangelist is close to some of his natural and acquired abilities, but the Holy Spirit transformed Paul by the giving of this gift, as well as others.

One of my favorite stories of people having gifts and using them comes from a long-time friend of mine who talks about a man known as Mr. Dan in his church. Mr. Dan had one gift, hospitality. He was welcoming. Mr. Dan was not given any 'flashy' gifts and was not a leader in the community. Mr. Dan stood at the entrance to the Sunday School building, year after year, and greeted the children and youth with a smile and a word of welcome. Sunday after Sunday, he welcomed children and youth for over thirty years.

When Mr. Dan died, the church was packed with men and women and children who came, not only from the local church, but from all over the country. When my friend asked people why they had come from so far, many of them said that Mr. Dan was the first person to help them understand that they were loved by Christ because he loved them and welcomed them into the church. It is the single, largest gathering my friend had ever led in worship.

Be open to the Spirit in your life and use your gifts. The blessings to you and to others will be enormous.

## Chapter Three

### Discerning our Gifts and Growing in Faith

#### Discovering our Gifts

The New Testament is very helpful about describing *charismata*, gifts, but it doesn't offer a lot of help for discovering what they are. St. Paul goes to great lengths to clear up some serious misunderstandings and abuses, yet says very little about how to identify the gifts each person has been given, see 1 Corinthians 12-14. If we knew which gifts are ours, then we could spend less time pursuing ministries and activities that don't really fit God's intentions and gifts for our lives. We would be more efficient and effective in using the gifts that we have been given. I have prepared a gifts inventory survey for each of you to take as one means for discovering your gifts, but, recognizing that this is not a completely certain way of discernment, want to offer you some spiritual practices that will assist you in discernment and ministry.

First, we all need to understand that we have been called by God. Jesus calls His followers one by one and that is how we have been called. It is personal and, coming from the God of love, is for us to know the love of God and to make that love known to others. Listen for and obey the call that God has on your life.

If God has called you as His own, and we know that that is His intention for all of us, and that He promises to send us gifts of the Spirit, then a healthy spiritual response would be obedience. Ask the question, "God, if you have called me, what do you want me to do?" And, "What gifts have you given me to fulfill this call on my life and support your church?" Answers will come, some clearer than others, as we live in obedience to God's call on our lives. It is the first step of the Christian life, to follow, and it comes with a promise that God will make Himself known.

Second, begin a study about the spiritual gifts. I have been sprinkling scriptural references throughout these notes and they make a good start. As, we believe that the Old and New Testaments are the word of God and contain all things necessary for salvation, so read the Bible. 1 Corinthians, chapters 12 through 14, are an excellent place to begin your study. Many of the gifts are listed and the purpose for the gifts are defined clearly.

Third, examine your feelings. A tremendous amount of work in physiology and neurology has been accomplished over the last decades and these studies reveal that religious feelings and behavior come from the right brain. Some scientists have even posited that there is a specific place in the brain where religious feelings are located. Who knows for certain, but this, then, is where many of us will be able to discover where our true gifts lie. Imagine that you have a gift and how you might exercise it. What does that feel like for you? Are the feelings positive or negative, fearful or pleasing? Fourth, experiment with the gifts. Wanting to have a particular gift is okay, but doesn't guarantee that God has or will give you that gift. The only way to know for sure is to

experiment with it. How would you know if you have the gift of hospitality unless you exercise it? Or, how would you know that you have the gift of teaching unless you try it out in real time? And how would you know if you have the gift of administration unless you take on the responsibility of organizing some ministry at church unless you take up the responsibility. Experimentation and practice is important.

The inventory you're getting ready to take will be helpful in bringing up the gifts you may have and most people's gifts appear in the top six of their highest scores. Start with the gifts that you identify in the survey and experiment with using them.

Finally, expect God to produce results through your exercise of His gifts. Results don't belong to us and you will find, along with countless Christians through the ages, that you may never know the results of your faithful use of the gifts God has given you. Using our spiritual gifts always produces God's intended results and are for God's glory, even though we may never know how it happened or whose gifts were required. The only consistent result of your faithful use of your gifts will be that you will be drawn closer to the source of the power behind our gifts and more deeply into God's presence and peace and grace and love.

### **Spiritual Gifts Inventory**

Rank each of the following statements as it applies to your experience or inclination.

**Much (3), Some (2), Little (1), or None (0)**

This is a self-survey and not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. Therefore, be sure to let your responses reflect your opinions of yourself.

#### **Spiritual Gifts Inventory Survey**

- \_\_\_ 1. I make a point to be with people of other cultures and ethnic backgrounds.
- \_\_\_ 2. I see destructive patterns in people's lives and help them find healthier ways of living.
- \_\_\_ 3. I listen as people tell me about their religious experiences and spiritual journeys.
- \_\_\_ 4. People often seek me out and ask me to pray with them.
- \_\_\_ 5. I can explain in simple ways complex ideas about God and how to be a Christian.
- \_\_\_ 6. I often praise coworkers for their good work and attitudes.
- \_\_\_ 7. I carefully get all information I need before moving into action.
- \_\_\_ 8. I can share deep truths with others about their problems.

- \_\_\_ 9. When I see a need, I spring into action and do something about it.
- \_\_\_ 10. I am materially blessed, and I give what to others freely.
- \_\_\_ 11. Being in charge doesn't mean I have to control everything.
- \_\_\_ 12. I can sit and simply listen to someone who needs a listening ear.
- \_\_\_ 13. I do the best I can and leave the rest in God's hand.
- \_\_\_ 14. I speak up and tell others when I don't believe they are telling the whole truth.
- \_\_\_ 15. I have experienced times when something miraculous happened.
- \_\_\_ 16. I look for opportunities to bring hope and God's comfort to those who are sick.
- \_\_\_ 17. I have spoken out loud in praise to God in words not readily understandable.
- \_\_\_ 18. I have been able to learn foreign languages easily.
- \_\_\_ 19. I am energized and feel joy when organizing a project.
- \_\_\_ 20. I know when there are conflicts between good and evil forces and feel empowered to struggle against evil.
- \_\_\_ 21. I offer friendship and other services to strangers without hesitation or fear.
- \_\_\_ 22. I have a special sense of knowing when others need my prayers.
- \_\_\_ 23. My circle of friends looks like a meeting of the United Nations.
- \_\_\_ 24. I am energized when I speak about what needs to be changed in church and other areas of community life.
- \_\_\_ 25. Inviting others to join me in something I enjoy is something I do every week.
- \_\_\_ 26. I find myself time and again listening to people's spiritual struggles and offering guidance.
- \_\_\_ 27. When I am a student in a class or the teacher of a class, other participants are energized and motivated.
- \_\_\_ 28. I am able to work with people and help them do their best.
- \_\_\_ 29. I am able to grasp deep truths about God and make sense of them.
- \_\_\_ 30. I am able to use my knowledge in complex situations and know what's right.
- \_\_\_ 31. I don't mind lending a hand and doing trivial jobs that are often overlooked.

- \_\_\_32. I give 10 percent of my income to church and more to other charitable needs.
- \_\_\_33. When I am working on a group project, I make the extra effort to communicate with everyone.
- \_\_\_34. Stopping what I am doing to help someone in need is a normal part of my day.
- \_\_\_35. When I believe that something is of God, I act boldly on my belief.
- \_\_\_36. My friends often ask me to help sort out what is real and what is phony.
- \_\_\_37. God has mysteriously intervened in extraordinary ways in my presence.
- \_\_\_38. I am able to counsel others to help restore them to mental and spiritual health.
- \_\_\_39. I have spoken in a language that I am not normally able to speak.
- \_\_\_40. I can hear verbal sounds not understood by others and understand what is meant.
- \_\_\_41. Organizing ideas, people, resources and schedules is easy and enjoyable for me.
- \_\_\_42. I need to know and to name an evil or demonic force in order to pray effectively for its elimination.
- \_\_\_43. I sense a special opportunity for ministry when my routine is interrupted by guests or strangers.
- \_\_\_44. Praying is my most enjoyable spiritual activity.
- \_\_\_45. I give thanks that the Church has such a wide diversity of people.
- \_\_\_46. I can see change coming and am not afraid to help people make the needed changes.
- \_\_\_47. Sharing how I came to a deeper faith comes naturally for me.
- \_\_\_48. I can be called on when someone needs help in making difficult decisions.
- \_\_\_49. I am good at giving directions to people so that they can complete projects successfully.
- \_\_\_50. I make a point to say a kind word to those whose abilities I admire.
- \_\_\_51. I am deeply satisfied when I study in order to explain hard concepts to others.
- \_\_\_52. I don't panic in difficult situations, but weigh the possibilities to find a solution.
- \_\_\_53. I'd rather stay in the background doing the labor than be out front teaching or speaking.
- \_\_\_54. I spend a lot of time earning and raising money and an equal amount of time giving it away.

- \_\_\_55. I am good at organizing and leading a group to meet their goals.
- \_\_\_56. I walk gently with people who are grieving, and can walk with them through the time of healing.
- \_\_\_57. I live the best I can each day, one day at a time, not worrying about tomorrow.
- \_\_\_58. I can “see through” people and circumstances and know what’s real and what’s not.
- \_\_\_59. Time and again I have seen miracles.
- \_\_\_60. I am able to help, comfort, and counsel when people are deeply troubled.
- \_\_\_61. I have had the experience of speaking in prayer-praise language.
- \_\_\_62. I am able to move into another culture, speak another language, and feel at home.
- \_\_\_63. I am good at carrying the responsibility for organizing group activities toward some stated goal.
- \_\_\_64. God uses my obedience to free others from evil forces.
- \_\_\_65. I do not mind and am unafraid to welcome strangers into my church or my home.
- \_\_\_66. I feel urges to pray for others at various times.

**Spiritual Gifts Inventory Answer Sheet**

The numbers on the chart that follows correspond to the numbered questions on the inventory items you just ranked. Look back at the survey to see the value you assigned to each item and pencil in the value (3,2,1, or 0) next to the numbered question. So if you put a 3 for question 16, find 16 on the answer sheet and pencil in a 3 on that line (that would correspond with Healing as a gift). After listing the 66 values with the corresponding gifts, add your total horizontally for each row, across the page. Put the sum on the line in the total column. The sum should range from 0 to 9 in each category of gift.

The total for each row indicates the extent to which you may be gifted or inclined to operate the gift named. Look and see which gifts have the highest totals to see which gifts God has already given you or is preparing to give you. Next, pray for God to show you ways and to give you opportunities to exercise this gift. For example, if the total for teaching is high, you will want to ask God to give you opportunities to use this gift. It’s the same with all of the gifts. One caution, this survey is obviously imperfect and many of us are new to the idea that God has given us spiritual gifts to operate for God’s glory. Be mindful that having opened yourself up to the Holy Spirit, other gifts may come at God’s instigation and God will help you develop whatever gifts have been entrusted to you.

### Spiritual Gifts Inventory Answer Sheet

Gifts	Question Numbers		Values	Total
Administration	19	41	63	
Apostle	1	23	45	
Discernment	14	36	58	
Evangelism	3	25	47	
Exhortation	6	28	50	
Exorcism	20	42	64	
Faith	13	35	57	
Giving	10	32	54	
Healing	16	38	60	
Hospitality	21	43	65	
Prayer	22	44	66	
Interpretation	18	40	62	
Knowledge	7	29	51	
Leadership	11	33	55	
Mercy/Compassion	12	34	56	
Miracles	15	37	59	
Pastor	4	26	48	
Prayer-Praise Language	17	39	61	
Prophecy	2	24	46	
Serving	9	31	53	
Teaching	5	27	49	
Wisdom	8	30	52	

Write down your top three spiritual gifts:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

As you can see from your totals, gifts are not always singular and each of us may have several gifts of the Spirit for use in the building up of the Body of Christ and for drawing us closer to knowing and acting on the will of God as it touches our lives and those around us. I encourage you to pray about these gifts God has given you and ask God to show you ways that you may exercise these gifts in your life at church and in the broader community. I would also encourage you to ask others whether they see these gifts in you and ask them to offer examples so that you can confirm that God has indeed blessed you in specific ways.

Many of you are already using your gifts and I invite you to be confident that they come with the power of God to make them effective. After discerning your gifts, you may want

to look at your life and your church community and see where you may best offer your gifts to God and grow in the Spirit.

The gifts you have been given have been given with a purpose that is corporate and private. As you use your gifts, you will find that your ministry is effective and that your life will be drawn more intimately into the life and the will of God. You may also come to recognize others' gifts and be more open to allowing them to exercise their gifts as you exercise yours.

Finally, I think our gifts can change over time as we grow in our life with God and as God needs specific gifts for His specific purposes. Pay attention to the Holy Spirit moving, but also recall that if we have to serve and minister outside our given gifts, then we will need to rest and rely on God even more.

## Chapter Four

### Understanding Our Gifts

So now you have some inkling of the spiritual gifts God has given you. Some of you are surprised. Some of you are thinking, of course. Others aren't exactly sure what we're going to do with our gifts and how they can be used in our lives and within our church communities. No worries! Thanks be to God! The Lord who has given you these gifts will graciously show you how to use them and when they may best be used.

There are varieties of gifts and some of us, most of us, have been given more than one gift. All of these supernatural or "extra-natural" gifts are used for building up the community of the church, for drawing us into the sphere of God's presence and power. Some of the gifts work in a singular way. Some gifts go together and require companionship. That is, some of the gifts are used in conjunction with another person who has been given a complimentary gift. For instance, an evangelist, one who 'brings people to a decision to follow Jesus as Lord', needs an apostle in the community to set the stage for persons to be ready to receive God's love for their lives.

God gives gifts as signs of God's love for us. We use them according to God's purposes and the results are truly remarkable and life-giving for the person exercising their gifts and the community receiving the gifts. Here are some brief definitions of the gifts and some examples and suggestions of how God may exercise them through you. I have also included some Bible stories to show what the gift looks like as well as some current examples. All Bible references and stories are from the New Revised Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted. Finally, I have included suggestions for how you might consider exercising your gifts in your life and at church.

The gifts are in no order of importance, since all the gifts are needed to build up the Body of Christ, the church, and to be Christ's Body in the world. They are in alphabetical order in case you want to read ahead to begin to gain some insight on the gifts God has given you.

***Administration or Ministry*** comes from the Greek word *kubernesis* and often describes the position and responsibility of a pilot or a helmsman of a ship. It is a directional and managerial gift. This extraordinary ability manifests itself in organizing and coordinating persons and materials effectively to reach objectives and goals consistent with God's plan for the church. It is different from leadership in the sense that it does not require overall vision for the community, but a specific vision for a particular function.

The Administrator pursues objectives and plans laid out by the corporate wisdom of a church and have gifts for organization, appraisal, use of time and others' skills, and the practical application of others' gifts and the church's resources. The Administrator finds more joy in the smooth operations and forward movement than in the actual completion of the project.

Having someone with gifts for administration is good for any ministry as a means for keeping it organized and coordinating persons and activities in an effective way. We often miss this gift in our organizing as we get excited about what God is calling us to do and putting together a team for the ministry. Someone with the gifts for administration may not share in the excitement or even participate in the actual ministry sometimes, but their gift will make everyone more effective and gracious about the pace of ministry.

So, when God has freed the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and sent them off on their excursion to grow close to God and become a functioning community, Moses, the leader, finds that the responsibilities of keeping the community together is becoming burdensome. God sees it, too, and send Moses' father-in law to help him by using his gifts for administration. Read this passage from Exodus and you'll see the gift of the administrator.

Exodus 18:13-27

<sup>13</sup> The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. <sup>14</sup> When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" <sup>15</sup> Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. <sup>16</sup> When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." <sup>17</sup> Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup> You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. <sup>19</sup> Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; <sup>20</sup> teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. <sup>21</sup> You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. <sup>22</sup> Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. <sup>23</sup> If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their

home in peace.”<sup>24</sup> So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said.  
<sup>25</sup> Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. <sup>26</sup> And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses, but any minor case they decided themselves.  
<sup>27</sup> Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went off to his own country.

At the start of the early church, the first followers of Jesus become so busy with the fast moving pace of prayer and preaching and healing and the sheer wonder of what God is doing. They begin to wear out with the demands on their time and the challenges of the growing community. Read from the Book of Acts to see the administrator’s gift at work

#### Acts 6:1-7

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup> And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, <sup>4</sup> while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.” <sup>5</sup> What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup> They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. <sup>7</sup> The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Most churches have some major activity beyond worship that involve a large group of people, sometimes the entire church. The church I serve has a Country Fair that’s been going on continuously for 165 years. A large number of our members are involved all through the year and on Fair day, thousands of people come onto our grounds for a variety of activities. The best years for our Fair are the years when we have leadership that clearly has the gift of administration. Enthusiasm and commitment are lost without order.

*Apostle* comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means ambassador or delegate or messenger or herald. The Greek word has two primary uses, one nautical and one political. The nautical term refers to a vessel carrying authorized cargo. The political term refers to a person who represents another with full power and authority – kind of like a power of attorney. The word appears 79 times in the New Testament.

The Apostle in a general sense forms a strong attachment to the personality, teaching and influence of Jesus Christ. The person then spreads the teachings and extols the virtues of Christ and is sent out to bear Christ's authority. The Apostle is different from a disciple, a follower of or learner from Christ; in the sense the she or he has an extraordinary ability to cultivate a receptivity toward Christ and Christ's ongoing ministry. Others may "win" people to Christ, but the Apostle is the ambassador, organizer, and cultivator of means for ministries. They may possess an aura of spiritual authority and power that brings about cohesion and unity among persons who differ widely in attitude and interests and the gifts has the ability to move beyond the local church to unite and inspire many local churches under Christ.

Many ordained persons have the gift of being an apostle and it is a blessed church that has one and can encourage them to use their gift. People are drawn to the person who possess this gift and are empowered by them to use their gifts in turn. It is not always the ordained person in the church who has this gift and may be that lay person who exercises their authority in the community to bring about the use of people's gifts and helps God bind the community one to another.

The New Testament is full of examples of the apostle at work and Paul's letters reflect that sense of encouragement and organization that call more and more people to the life with Christ as a community. Consider this passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians and how he reminds them of their calling and the purpose of the gifts God has given them.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>11</sup> The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. <sup>14</sup> We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

The apostle may be that visionary in your church who holds to who the church is currently; how God is calling the community to continue on; or how best to enter into new ministries depending on the gifts that have come into the community or some new task before the community.

**Discernment** or the gift of discerning (Gr. *diakrisis*) the Spirits is the power to estimate, to judge, separate, discriminate, oppose, dispute or be free from doubt. This gift is the extraordinary ability to know good and evil, right and wrong, and what is either human nature or God's grace. It is a knowledge that is critical for the protection and health of the body of Christ.

Many people have this gift, but not enough of us exercise it to assist in determining a course of action and what urgings or signs are coming from God or from someone or something else. Persons with this gift, though, are not quick to judge, but instead rely on prayer and reflection to see clearly an entire issue. They may also appear more introverted, but have a strong ability to utilize their feelings to hear from God, especially when relying on their feelings through prayer.

Counselors, spiritual directors, leaders often possess the gift for discernment and exercise it on behalf of others to assist them in discerning God's purposes for their lives or the life of community. Again, it is a gift that requires one to be steeped in prayer and thoughtfulness.

One of my all-time favorite stories of discernment comes from the Old Testament when God is calling Gideon to lead God's people against a threat to their existence. I like it so much because it feels so common place. I like it, too, because it reminds us that God is not testing us when we come to God in prayer. God is patient and will allow us to come to discernment in terms that we can understand. The entire chapter is helpful and even fun to consider, but this small portion will give you a hint that God is willing to help you understand in a variety of ways

Judges 6:36-40

<sup>36</sup> Then Gideon said to God, "In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, <sup>37</sup> I am going to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said." <sup>38</sup> And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. <sup>39</sup> Then Gideon said to God, "Do not let your anger burn against me, let me speak one more time; let me, please, make trial with the fleece just once more; let it be dry only on the fleece, and on all the ground let there be dew." <sup>40</sup> And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

In the early Church, there was powerful disagreement about how Jewish new Christians needed to be and the leadership held a council in Jerusalem. They listened to Peter and Paul and after prayer came to a decision not to burden Gentile believers with all 613 laws of the Old Testament. Here's the letter James, head of the church, wrote

Acts 15:23-29

<sup>23</sup> with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. <sup>24</sup> Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from

us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, <sup>25</sup> we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup> who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup> We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. <sup>28</sup> For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: <sup>29</sup> that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

A person with the gift of discernment will be helpful to have involved in a wide variety of ministries and as a steady and Godly counselor to those leading or exercising some kind of authority in ministry.

*Evangelism* comes from the Greek word *euangelizamai*, meaning to declare, to announce, to proclaim, or to present good news to win new persons to Christ. Although used rarely in the New Testament, it is a word that is rich in a sense of jubilation or to express liberation from some great hindrance. Evangelism is the extraordinary ability to give such a witness to the love of God as expressed in Jesus Christ that it moves others to accept that love and become disciples of Christ. Through the efforts of the evangelist using her gifts, new birth into the kingdom is possible. The evangelist is the “harvester”, to use agricultural symbol, that “wins” persons after others in the church have done their works of love, teaching, encouraging, etc.

Authentic evangelists are not always preachers, though a persuasive preacher can open the way for the Holy Spirit to change hearts and draw people into the Christian life. The reality is that most evangelists are laypersons. They are interested in others’ spiritual welfare and know the importance of their church in the nurture of persons. The personalness of their relationships and the quality of their lives opens the way for the Spirit to move. And though all of us are called to bring others to Christ, our children and friends, for instance, some of us have a particular gift for this work.

The most impressive and obvious result of people using the gift of evangelism is the growth of the body in number. Christ commands us to make disciples of all, so we need to pay attention to numbers and the ministry of evangelism. It is important for all of us to have an eye toward bringing others to Christ, but we should make way for the work of the evangelists among us and keep in mind the steady and the spectacular work of the Spirit and support that ministry in an everyday kind of way.

The Bible is filled with stories of persons bringing others to God and particularly the New Testament. I like two stories in particular because so much of the work of Christ and the early followers is sharing the Good News and the offer of real life. From a quiet standpoint, we should consider Philip and Andrew bringing others into Christ’s presence. Andrew brings his brother Peter and Philip brings Nathanael (John 2:35-51) and during Jesus growing ministry, there’s a sweet moment when Philip and Andrew bring a group of Gentiles to Jesus.

John 12:20-22

<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

There are spectacular stories as well, when the Holy Spirit is so powerful that even a short sermon can convert thousands of people.

Acts 2:14-41

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.

<sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> ‘In the last days it will be, God declares,  
 that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
 and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
 and your young men shall see visions,  
 and your old men shall dream dreams.  
<sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
 in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
 and they shall prophesy.  
<sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above  
 and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.  
<sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness  
 and the moon to blood,  
 before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.  
<sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’  
<sup>22</sup> “You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested  
 to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among  
 you, as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this man, handed over to you according to the definite  
 plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside  
 the law. <sup>24</sup> But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was  
 impossible for him to be held in its power. <sup>25</sup> For David says concerning him,  
 ‘I saw the Lord always before me,  
 for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;  
<sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
 moreover my flesh will live in hope.  
<sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
 or let your Holy One experience corruption.  
<sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the ways of life;  
 you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’  
<sup>29</sup> “Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died  
 and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup> Since he was a prophet, he knew  
 that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his  
 throne. <sup>31</sup> Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,  
 ‘He was not abandoned to Hades,  
 nor did his flesh experience corruption.’  
<sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted  
 at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy  
 Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend into  
 the heavens, but he himself says,  
 ‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
 “Sit at my right hand,  
<sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.”’<sup>36</sup> Therefore let the entire house of Israel  
 know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you  
 crucified.” <sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and  
 to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” <sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, “Repent, and  
 be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be  
 forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you, for

your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”<sup>40</sup> And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”<sup>41</sup> So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

The person with gifts for evangelism is ideal for a welcoming or newcomers type of ministry. Their desire to draw others into the life that is really life gives them a kind of energy that is welcoming and energized by working to draw others into our churches and the Christian life. Remember, it’s not preachiness, but a quality of life and a willingness to share faith and the life of the church. Should an evangelist start getting “preachy” or hard and judgmental in their approach, a gentle reminder of the gentleness and patience of God usually gets them back in the right place.

**Exhortation** comes from the Greek *parakaleo* or *paraklesis* a word related to the Holy Spirit the *Paraclete*, and can be translated shortly as comforter or strong companion. It is a word with two parts, one meaning ‘call’ and the other ‘companionship.’ Together they form a ministry of being with and for one another. Exhortation is the extraordinary ability to inspire, encourage, and strengthen others in and through their efforts to live out God’s will and calling as Christians in pain and pleasure, want and plenty.

Christian living is no easy undertaking and God has equipped the Church with members who are powerful in their ministry of encouragement. Exhorters are often quick to speak a word of caution or instruction as well as comfort, but all with an unmistakable spirit of caring. They tend to be persons centered on general encouragement rather than project oriented. They are just as willing to be with a person in need as a companion rather than as a problem solver. Exhorters are persons with the gift for bearing the light in dark places. They can be ordained or lay, but an exhortation, an encouragement at the right moment can make all the difference in someone’s life and in the life of a community. Let the exhorters speak up because we can all benefit from their gift.

St. Paul had more than his fair share of gifts, but one of his greatest gifts was that of an exhorter. Read his encouragement to the struggling Christians in Philippi:

Philippians 4:2-9

<sup>2</sup> I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. <sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

As parents encourage children and leader encourage followers, so all of us are called to some level of being exhorters. Persons with this particular gift move beyond regular encouragement and are good persons to have advising the leadership of the church and attached to programs that are making a change in a church or in the world. Their ability to encourage is almost inexhaustible and the joy that comes with that encouragement can be infectious.

*Exorcism* is not on St. Paul's list and I would prefer to steer away from it, but is clearly a gift he and others exercised in the early church and by our Lord Himself. Casting our evil and evil spirits is not a comfortable concept for most of we moderns because it does not fit our scientific worldview which precludes attributing power to anything except what can be quantified or measured. If we've lived for any time at all, though, we know that there are powers and institutionalized influences that demean human beings and communities that need to be fought, both physically and spiritually.

Exorcism comes from the Greek word *exorkistes* and it basically means to expel, cast out, force out, release, diffuse, extricate, to free. The definition of the gift is the ability to use various means of faith, prayers, spirit-music, and other gifts to liberate persons from evil-centered hindering forces so that they may be in effective ministry to and for the body of Christ.

The gift carries a yearning to free others from obvious enslavement to evil and usually comes with strong gifts of discernment and mercy. In proper practice, the demonic power passes from the possessed to the gifted and diminishes under the powerful influence of grace and love. Peace is always the result, a peace that is extraordinary and lasting.

In the Episcopal Church, there are exorcists who are under the direction of the local Bishop, though clergy may give a house blessing that includes a prayer to drive out all evil from the place. I have known one exorcist in my life and know him quite well. He is the sweetest person I have ever met and that makes sense if we're talking about driving out evil forces through the love of God. It is not *StarWars* and the forces fighting equally, but God restoring persons and communities to their rightful selves.

In the Gospels, Jesus is casting out demons on a regular basis and the stories are both personal and chilling. The result is always restoration. Be mindful that this is a gift, but one that carries challenges and requires companionship and prayer support.

Mark 5:1-15

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup> And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. <sup>3</sup> He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; <sup>4</sup> for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. <sup>6</sup> When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; <sup>7</sup> and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." <sup>8</sup> For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." <sup>10</sup> He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. <sup>11</sup> Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; <sup>12</sup> and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." <sup>13</sup> So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came

out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. <sup>14</sup> The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened.

<sup>15</sup> They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid.

St. Paul, too, has moments where he is speaking out against evil spirits and evil forces.

Acts 16:16-19

<sup>16</sup> One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." <sup>18</sup> She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. <sup>19</sup> But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities.

In our modern, scientific world where material proof is the primary means of understanding and living, it is difficult for many of us to remember that there is a spiritual dimension in all of creation. Some of the spiritual dimension is in opposition to God and God's purposes. Whether it is that whispering voice in our head judging ourselves or leading us down paths that are not healthy or institutional evil in our communities (racism, sexism, etc.) or organizations that oppress others, there is a spiritual battle at work in the world around us. Naming that reality, praying, and acting on God's behalf are part of the Christian's call in the world.

**Faith** is in all of us, but the gift is distinctive. A general faith and trusting in God is basic to our relationship with God and Christian discipleship. The Spirit gives us all faith to live and trust in God, to be courageous in our prayer and action, to rest assured that God is present with us always. Faith is all about a relationship with God and is not quantitative. That said, persons who live their faith over a long time, have experienced a growing sense of trust and assurance in God and God's presence and action in their lives.

The gift of faith is different. The gift is an extraordinary ability to extend general or saving faith to serve corporate and individual needs specifically related to the church life as the body of Christ. The Greek word *pistis*, denotes a strong conviction about and dedication to, in this case, Jesus Christ. We recognize this gift in persons who are well-seasoned Christians and demonstrate their gift in powerful works. They are persons with a child-like faith who have a special sense or feeling about something that is the will of God. When they are persuaded that God is doing something they begin to live and behave as though the object of their faith has already happened and become a channel of God's grace.

It sounds like optimism, but it goes much deeper. When we are in the presence of someone who has the gift of faith, they speak and act as though God has already begun some work or is bringing about some change when the rest of us have no idea. Persons exercising this gift, often have a gift for exhortation as well, since deep faith is such an encouragement to others. Persons with this gift are often found in prayer groups, are particularly supportive of clergy and pastors, and can be a fabulous resource for any ministry or church planning.

The Bible is filled with stories of persons with the gift of faith. They act in trust with God and that is the sign of their right relationship with God. Consider Abraham and Sarah and their trust in God. Moses was a person of deep faith who accomplished work far beyond his natural abilities. Ruth trust that the God of the Hebrews has a plan for her life and leaves all she knows to be with her mother-in-law. Samuel trust God's voice all the days of his life and leads Israel. David stands before Goliath in trust of God and not his own abilities.

Jesus is constantly teaching about faith to His first followers and to us as a means for encouraging us into a deeper life with God. It is a consistent core of His teaching for the life that is really life, the life lived with God.

Luke 17:5-6

<sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" <sup>6</sup> The Lord replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."

For Jesus and for us, faith is a way of life, a life connected to and directed by God.

**Giving** is also something we all participate in as followers of Christ. We, who have been given all that we are and all that we have by the generosity of God, are called to be generous givers ourselves. Whether it is our time, talent, or treasure, we are called to give.

The spiritual gift of giving is slightly different than the call we all share in. This gift is the ability to manage one's resources of income, time, energy, and skills to exceed what is considered to be a reasonable standard for giving to the church, an amount that brings joy and power to do more for further service. The Greek root, sometimes translated as generosity or liberality, is *metadidomi*, meaning to turn over, to share, to transfer.

The behavioral traits of this charismatic generosity include the intense desire and motivation to give and special abilities and opportunities to give abundantly. While giving manifests itself beyond money, if it is money, one's ability and opportunity to make money accompanies the gift. It also comes with a sense of joy in the giving itself, giving that feels good. It is a quiet gift. Persons with this gift don't want the left hand to know what the right hand is doing. If our spiritual gift is giving, God will provide the resources to do what can appear to be impossible.

Persons with the gift of giving are excellent resource for stewardship campaigns and programs that encourage persons to use their gifts for the church. They do not have to brag or overpower others by their giving, but having experienced the change in their own life and seeing God's "multiplying" abilities become wise counselors to others. In an almost entirely secular vein, persons with the gift of giving are also good investors and should be included somewhere in your financial planning and oversight.

So, there are some very gifted givers in the Biblical record and one that is important to take note of is King David. David is one of the most beloved children of God in the whole "Story" and even though his life is touched with imperfections, David is always seeking God and in seeking finds. God blesses David for that and in turn David is able to bless others. Here's a little example of that as David is gathering the wealth and materials that he will be handing over to his son, Solomon, and God's people to build the first temple. David is the giver and provider and gives good judgment to his son and the people.

1 Chronicles 22:11-19

<sup>11</sup> Now, my son, the LORD be with you, so that you may succeed in building the house of the LORD your God, as he has spoken concerning you. <sup>12</sup> Only, may the LORD grant you discretion and understanding, so that when he gives you charge over Israel you may keep the law of the LORD your God. <sup>13</sup> Then you will prosper if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed. <sup>14</sup> With great pains I have provided for the house of the LORD one hundred thousand talents of gold, one million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond weighing, for there is so much of it; timber and stone too I have provided. To these you must add more. <sup>15</sup> You have an abundance of workers: stonecutters, masons, carpenters, and all kinds of artisans without number, skilled in

working<sup>16</sup> gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Now begin the work, and the LORD be with you.”<sup>17</sup> David also commanded all the leaders of Israel to help his son Solomon, saying,<sup>18</sup> “Is not the LORD your God with you? Has he not given you peace on every side? For he has delivered the inhabitants of the land into my hand; and the land is subdued before the LORD and his people.”<sup>19</sup> Now set your mind and heart to seek the LORD your God. Go and build the sanctuary of the LORD God so that the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the holy vessels of God may be brought into a house built for the name of the LORD.”

Jesus says much about what kind of givers we are called to be, both in terms of generosity and multiplying or expanding what has been given us for good purposes or for just using our gifts and talents in the right way. The parable of the talents, here, is often considered in terms of the one who buried his talent, but the other servants are praised for doubling up on what has been given. That’s the gift of the giver.

Matthew 25:14-29

<sup>14</sup> “For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup> to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup> The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup> But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. <sup>19</sup> After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>22</sup> And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>24</sup> Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ <sup>26</sup> But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?’ <sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”

**Healing** has always been a centerpiece of the Christian community. Our Lord healed many, many people in heart, mind and body. His work continues in us. Our modern day hospitals are rooted in the hospitality and healing ministries of the various monastic communities who helped establish institutional healing as a ministry of the church.

The New Testament words for healings are *iamaton* and *therapeia*, meaning cures or serving to make whole and it goes beyond physical illnesses to include mind, emotions, society, morals, theology, and philosophy. The specific reference to a spiritual gift of healing in 1 Corinthians 12:9 is actually a plural form and indicates this holistic view of healing at the hand of God. The gift of Healing, then, is the extraordinary ability God gives to certain members of the church to cure or to be cured of ill conditions that hinder effective ministries for Christ, the church, or individuals. This definition narrows the full possibilities for healing only in the sense that healing ministries are not limited to the church, but the gift of healings within the church is a gift given for the life of the church specifically. Healing builds up the church for specific ministries.

Like other spiritual gifts that free persons, the gift of Healing often goes with the gift of discernment, allowing the gifted person the knowledge of the conditions of a person or of a community. These persons also do not always know the effects of the use of their gift. When they do learn of them, they usually have no need to publicize their importance. Rather, in a quiet and meditative manner, sometimes with the laying on of hands and anointing and sometimes not, the healer prays. And the results vary for God is not only interested in our physical and mental well-being, but in the healing of the entire person which may not require that an illness or deadly condition be removed.

For those of used to the diagnostic considerations and the surgical or medical response in Western medicine, we can see the pattern in a spiritual sense. Certainly those who work in the medical field are healers of all sorts and conditions of persons. In the spiritual sense, there may be a connection to medicine, but the pattern of consideration, prayer, diagnosis of the issue and prayer or the laying on of hands is more supernatural than the qualitative healing most of us have experienced. And don't please don't misunderstand, I have certainly had my spirit lifted when an antibiotic worked or a surgeon helped the problem with my knee. Healing as a gift of the Spirit is different only that it does not have to involve medicine or surgery. In my experience, this is an unusual gift and if this is your gift, please engage with someone who has gifts of discernment so that it does not become a trap for pridefulness.

There are healing stories throughout the Bible. It is one of the ways we experience God's involvement in the creation and in the lives of people like you and me. There are stories that are dramatic, like Elisha bringing the Shunnamite's son back from the dead. There are gentle stories of healing like Boaz restoring the lives of Ruth and Naomi by taking Ruth into his home. Jesus heals in gentle and in dramatic ways, all as a sign of the reign

of God entering into our lives. In all of Jesus' healing moments, there is an important quality of connectedness. Jesus is fully present with the person He heals, looking them in the eyes, showing them the face of God's love, asking what it is that they want. It is so personal and reminds those of us with gifts for healing that the gift is personal, between you and the other person. So, when Jesus is touched in a crowd and feels the healing power go out from him, he stops.

Mark 5:24b-34

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. <sup>25</sup> Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup> She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup> for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." <sup>29</sup> Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. <sup>30</sup> Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" <sup>31</sup> And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" <sup>32</sup> He looked all around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Healing gifts go with personal connection to God and to the person receiving the healing presence of God.

**Hospitality** is another of those gifts not named directly by St. Paul in his lists of spiritual gifts, but it clearly represents a gift of the Spirit and is practiced throughout the New Testament and the early church. Now, hospitality doesn't refer to good cooks or workers in the kitchen, as important as they are. It is not limited to ushers and greeters and members of the Newcomer's Committee. The spiritual gift of Hospitality does not function in this way.

The word *philonexia* in Greek means love or fondness of strangers and is made up of two words (*philos* – friendliness, accepting, openness and *zenos* meaning stranger, alien or outsider). The definition of the gift of Hospitality is the ability God gives certain persons to extend caring and sharing to persons (strangers) beyond their intimate circle of friends and acquaintances. It is a gift to demonstrate and establish the unlimited and inclusive companionship of Christ in the lives of other persons.

Like most of the animal kingdom, human beings are territorial creatures who tend to protect our ground or habitat from unfamiliar and unwanted intruders. Christianity was to be different. Jesus commissioned us to go to all people (*ta ethne*), to offer loving attention to aliens and strangers. Persons who have the charismatic gift of Hospitality actually attract outsiders and show a sincere concern for them. They tend to prefer strangers and delight in meeting new people. They are quick to respond to particular concerns of individuals and are always at the ready to help others. They are strictly people persons.

The difference between the evangelist and the person with the gift of Hospitality is that the latter sees Christ in the stranger and the evangelist sees the stranger *in Christ*, in the communion. The gift of Hospitality makes visitors to a church know that they are wanted or needed. New members learn from these gifted persons that the gospel is good news for people, not merely a good subject for some program or a product for an institution.

Persons with gifts for Hospitality should certainly be considered for newcomers' ministry and welcoming persons into church, but they are more likely to bring someone to church than an average church member would bring someone to church and they will always be looking for that next person as opposed to figuring out how to connect someone into the life of the church. Their connection is already made as far as the person with the gift for Hospitality is concerned.

Hospitality is a serious responsibility in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean culture and welcoming the stranger or alien is one of the challenges of the law and the prophets. We see numerous stories of the gift being exercised, from Abraham and Sarah welcoming the three strangers who turn out to be angels to Jesus being at table with friend and foe alike, being welcomed into their homes. Of the hospitality stories in the scripture, one that shines forth is the story of Jesus with little Zacchaeus. Jesus is looking for Zacchaeus as persons with the gift of hospitality look for that next person to welcome into the fold. I like the story because it has the twist that Jesus invites himself into Zacchaeus' home to dine and Zacchaeus responds and is changed by the interaction with Jesus.

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. <sup>2</sup> A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup> So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. <sup>7</sup> All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” <sup>8</sup> Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

*Interpretation of Tongues* is alphabetically correct, but oddly placed since it should rightly follow speaking in tongues. Yet this particular gift of interpretation actually goes beyond translating *glossolalia* or heavenly languages. The Greek word for interpretation is *diemeneuo*, meaning to make clear, to explain a message, to expound on a meaning, or to translate into another language or vernacular for understanding. Interpretation is the extraordinary ability to hear, comprehend, and translate spiritual messages given by others in unknown languages or to clarify spiritual messages from someone who speaks in a known language, not known by the interpreter to a functional language.

Interpretation is a gift of unfolding a mystery hidden in a foreign language and also a vital ministry of expounding the good news of Christ's redemption in a known language. An example of the latter is the story in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus where the unrecognized Christ unfolded the scripture to two disciples so that they would understand the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection. God gives the gift of interpretation as a means for ensuring that a sound and 'correct' spiritual message is delivered. Interpretation is the power to explain a situation or another person's words or actions whether it is the Bible, a foreign language or a heavenly tongue.

Having said that, I don't want to pass over the matter of the classical need of interpreters to clarify what is being said by people who speak in tongues so that they might build up the body of Christ. We will delve into tongues shortly, but St. Paul is clear that interpretation is a requirement for the use of tongues in public worship. My take on this is that St. Paul was trying to discourage a misuse of this showy gift and one way to ensure its proper use was to make sure that one or another one had the power of interpretation – for without interpretation the message is lost and therefore useless.

In much of Christianity, speaking in tongues and the interpretation of those tongues is somewhat limited, but the need to interpret important theological and pastoral meaning is critical for the life of the church, whether it is by the ordained person or by a member of the church community. We're all interpreting the Christian life by the way we live and the things we say, but some of us are gifted at this work and can make the most complex simple and understandable.

From scripture, we can consider Joseph interpreting the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker and interpreting Pharaoh's dreams as examples of the gift at work (Genesis 40:1-41:40). Daniel interprets dreams in Babylon for King Nebuchadnezzar and writing on the wall for King Balshazzar. In both instances, a supernatural gift, meaning one connected to God and God's purposes, is in play. So it is in the Church when someone with the gift of interpretation of tongues exercises their gift to connect us to God's purposes.

**Knowledge** is not necessarily the sense of acquired data or information that may pertain to the natural world and the order of things, but a special bias toward God's particular relationship with the church and its relationship to the world. The Greek word, *gnosis*, means to know universal and timeless truths and facts relating to God's will and mission for the church. Knowledge, then, is the extraordinary power to understand the universal and timeless truths of God and to link them with the church and its mission through Christ for justice and right living (righteousness) in the world.

Although every Christian has a general knowledge of God given through the power of the Holy Spirit about the nature of Christ, God gives some persons an elevated understanding. Persons with this gift are prone to think and speak theologically. That is, they speak often in terms that link God and human life. It is not merely book learning of theologians, nor is it limited to knowledge of the scripture and Bible verses, it translates the Jesus of history into the Christ of faith.

Persons with this gift speak with a ring of authority and can simplify the most complicated spiritual truths into understandable language. They also tend to inspire a sense of trust in the hearers that truth is being made known. It also can often be measured by the natural gifts of reason and logic. Good pastors have this gift, but it is by no means limited to ordained persons. In fact, my experience of persons with the gift of knowledge is that lay persons are often more likely to have this gift as a result of their faithful following, young or old.

Knowledge is a gift from God and is connected to living in relationship with God. The scriptures are filled with pithy descriptions of knowledge and wisdom and leafing through the Book of Proverbs will give a broader understanding of knowledge and the connection to God.

Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Persons with a gift of knowledge are particular helpful in Bible study and small groups for what they can bring to the group. They are also a great addition in church planning and in church leadership.

**Leadership** comes from the Greek word, *proistemi*, and suggests the position of a sailor who stands on the bow of the boat to point out the way to a destination and to guide the skipper around dangers that may come along the way. Translated into a spiritual gift, leadership leads, guides, or directs members of the Body of Christ to fulfill the church's commission. It also equips its recipients to offer effective guidance to individuals who want to be effective in their ministry. Unlike the gift of teaching that can be used in hypothetical situations, the gift of leadership is a gift that instructs in a specific location.

The person who has the gift of leadership has an extraordinary ability to envision God's will and purpose for the church and to demonstrate persuasive skills to capture the imaginations, energies, skills and spiritual gifts of others to pursue and accomplish God's will. Leaders can set goals, always derived from God's directing if they are Godly aims. Leaders see what is essential for the well-being of the community and to motivate so that there is harmony as the community works to accomplish God's purposes for that group of Christians. Leaders are most effective when they are attached to a community.

Leaders are always out front and may appear to have their heads in the clouds, but can see the entire view. Unlike persons with the gift of exhortation who inspire and encourage by being with and doing with others, leaders often stand at a distance. Therefore a large amount of faith and energy is required to operate this gift and a stubborn belief that God is at work in individuals and in the life of a community.

Another reality of the gift of leadership is that people follow. Leaders, on the other hand, are not always good followers. God gifts them to lead and not to follow and they are usually quick to volunteer to lead a project even though they may know very little about it at first. And, while leaders are by nature and position, ahead or out front, they may never hold themselves deliberately aloof from followers nor consider themselves superior. Leaders want to be trusted because they consider trustworthiness one of the highest Christian virtues and because people follow because they see the virtue of Christ in the leader.

The record of leadership in the Bible begins with Moses and Aaron and Joshua (see Exodus). It is a leadership style that fits many different situations, but is always connected to these persons listening for God and listening to God. There's a real reluctance on many leaders' part to take up the role of leadership, but the encouragement and empowerment of God compels the person to take up their role.

Exodus 4:10-17

<sup>10</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." <sup>11</sup> Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" <sup>12</sup> Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." <sup>13</sup> But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." <sup>14</sup> Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. <sup>15</sup> You

shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. <sup>16</sup> He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. <sup>17</sup> Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”

Call it humility, call it reluctance, there is a quality of leadership in the scriptural examples that keeps God and God’s purposes at the forefront. And, of course, there are moments when the leader steps out on their own, apart from God, and the results are almost always cataclysmic. (See Moses and Aaron calling out water without given praise to God in Number 20 or Joshua attempting to continue the entrance into the Holy Land when the community is not in full submission to God in Joshua 7). The leader must remain in prayerful connection to God and remember the stewardship of God’s gift.

Or put another way, the leader has authority over the community or over some aspect of the ministry, but is also under authority to God. Here is an example in Jesus’ ministry that speaks to the order of leadership and obedience.

Matthew 8:5-13

<sup>5</sup> When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him <sup>6</sup> and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.” <sup>7</sup> And he said to him, “I will come and cure him.” <sup>8</sup> The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup> For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” <sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. <sup>11</sup> I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, <sup>12</sup> while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” <sup>13</sup> And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.” And the servant was healed in that hour.

So, the leader must in all things remain within the general and specific will or direction of God, not lording the position over others and not separated from God’s directing. Every ministry of the church requires some gift of leadership to organize and direct, so in putting together plans for ministry, remember the role of a leader in big things and little things.

***Mercy or Compassion*** is a gift that all of us have in some measure. It is, after all, the sign by which people will know we are followers of Christ that we love one another. At the Last Supper, Jesus told His first followers that people will recognize that you are my followers because you love. But like others, mercy comes as a gift of the Spirit as well, the special gift of *eleeo* – the extraordinary ability to feel and to act upon genuine empathy for others who are suffering physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual pain. The acting upon is an attempt to relieve the sufferer of the distress, pain or discomfort.

Mercy is a supersensitive ability that causes the gifted to feel the discomfort of the sufferer. It is a feeling with and for a person in misery that demands an act to relieve the person in distress. *Eleeo* also describes God's loving and redeeming acts toward the undeserving, initially toward Israel and eventually toward the whole world. Mercy is the only gift that is the subject of one of Jesus' beatitudes (Matthew 5:7) "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Cheerfulness and compassion are the dominant traits of the merciful. Rarely do they speak of 'doom and gloom' and criticism of others is seldom heard. Instead they are always encouraging and hopeful, assuming that the love and mercy of God will prevail.

Mercy is that gift from God that we all know, that experience of not getting what we really deserve for our sins and separation from God. The person with the gift of mercy counts no wrong done to them or the community, but is constantly reaching out in love and forgiveness and hopefulness that a person or a community will come around to God's way and what has gone on before is forgotten.

When we were children we made up all kinds of games, some resembling real sports and some, like street hockey with various rackets and tools from the garage used as our sticks hardly resembled an actual game. Since we were unsupervised, when there was a close call that brought up arguments or when the youngest among us failed time and again, we would call for a 'Do-over.' That meant that we would replay the last play that was too close to call or give the youngest among us a fourth or fifth strike. That's what the person with a gift of mercy is like, offering and teaching others to offer "do-overs". Thankfully, that's what God is like as well. Here's an example from the Gospels that speaks to the gentle mercy of God and the gift of mercy and compassion. It takes place after Jesus' death and resurrection and reflects the personalness of mercy and compassion Jesus has for His follower, Peter. Peter denies Jesus three times and three times Jesus offers Peter a "do-over", offers God's mercy.

John 21:15-19

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup> A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he

said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” <sup>19</sup> (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Persons with the gift of mercy are best involved in pastoral care ministries, in Stephen Ministry, in activities that require a heart and a gift for showing mercy to those who are struggling and those who, in human terms, do not deserve mercy and compassion. Outreach ministries are also a good place to include someone with the gift of mercy as their open hearts can unlock the generosity and goodness of the community on behalf of others.

**Miracles** is another gift I have added to the lists of the apostles because it is such a persistent and consistent part of the Christian story and the Christian life. Some people assume that miracles ended with the first century and often people within the church today don't always recognize miracles. You and I are more likely to hear the largest numbers and the most dramatic miracles in medical, social and educational fields. This is not new. St. Augustine, writing in the 4<sup>th</sup> century wondered in his writings that Christians are fearful of talking about miracles because they don't want other Christians to think that they're crazy. Sound familiar?

Miracle is a dubious translation of two Greek words, *energemata dunameon*, which more correctly produce the words energies and power. *Energemata* can also be understood as operations in English, so perhaps we should consider miracles better as powerful operations or powerful works. So, the definition would be the extraordinary ability God gives to some persons to do powerful works that transcend other gifts and our perception of natural laws and means.

Some characteristics resemble the operation of the gift of faith, but with a slight difference in the lack of intentionality. Often, the person who has this gift doesn't necessarily know what's happening. She or he is prompted by some inner stirring of the Holy Spirit and something eventually comes to light that is extraordinary. As such, they don't proclaim, "And now I'm going to perform some miracle. Stand back and behold!" The gifted are often surprised by the outcome of their active response to a prompted need. The gift of miracles is a channeling of God's grace for a particular situation and, interestingly, is rarely repeatable. A person with the gift of miracles is usually someone who is being faithful in using the gifts of the Spirit and has developed a habit of being open to the grace and the power of God. Their prayer lives are often more active than many Christians.

Here are a couple of Biblical examples for your consideration.

1 Kings 17:7-16

<sup>8</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, <sup>9</sup>"Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." <sup>10</sup>So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." <sup>11</sup>As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." <sup>12</sup>But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." <sup>13</sup>Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup>For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." <sup>15</sup>She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. <sup>16</sup>The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Matthew 8:1-4

When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; <sup>2</sup> and there was a leper who came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." <sup>3</sup> He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. <sup>4</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

In both examples, it is clear that something extraordinary is happening, though I wonder in the example of Jesus with the leper whether Jesus' touch to a man who has not been touched in a long, long time due to his illness, is the real miracle. There are miracles at work in our lives and some of us are involved in a more frequent manner and that requires a life of deep prayer. And is miracles is too strong a word for your experience, then consider C. S. Lewis' quip that the more he prays, the more coincidences happen in his life. The person with the gift for miracles may go unnoticed by others and that's a good thing because it reminds the person and the community that all of these gifts come to us by the hand of God. A person with the gift of miracles is helpful in any endeavor, but particularly in hospital visiting and prayer groups within the community.

*Pastor* is not one of the offices noted in the New Testament, such as deacon, elder, presbyter, and bishop; yet in many modern churches a pastor is a title of office. In our ordination service, it is one of the responsibilities of the priest. The fact is that a person may be one of the officers mentioned in the scripture, yet not have the gift (*charisma*) of pastoring. The truth is that many non-ordained persons are really excellent pastors and have the gift of the Spirit.

The Greek word for “pastor” is *poimen*, meaning shepherd. The word means to protect, to oversee, to manage, to care for, to assemble and to feed. The definition of the gift is the extraordinary ability to carry varieties of spiritual, physical, and social concerns for groups and individuals and to persist over long periods of time and circumstances as effective care-givers.

The spiritual gift of pastor carries the drive and capacity to shoulder concern for many people at one time. It tends to be concerned about spiritual and physical needs related to maturation and effective participation in the body of Christ. The pastor responds to a call for help, but also seeks to get others involved in the work. To the one gifted with pastoring, ministry is not a solo act. It is the affair of the flock or the church, but never at the expense of confidentiality and privacy. The pastor is also concerned with peace, harmony, cohesion, unity, purpose, common goals and fellowship with the overall goal of uniting a community, like the shepherd bringing the sheep in to the fold. So, it is a gift that, while handy as an ordained person, cannot be limited to the clergy to build an effective, loving Christian community. In fact, many Christians are given this gift of being a pastor when they open up their lives to God and God’s purposes.

We’ve all known good pastors and the best we know are those who exercise their gift, not for power and authority, but for the good of persons and for the good of the community, lay or ordained. It is a gift that models God’s shepherding of our lives (See Psalm 23) and one that holds the community in love and care for one another and for the life of the world. Though the pastor’s work is often gentle leading, there are moments when the pastor is required to pull out their shepherd’s staff to protect the community or to discipline those who are creating turmoil disagreement (See Jesus with the scribes and Pharisees through the Gospels).

Of the many gifts St. Paul exercised, his gift as a pastor is remarkable and we can see from the opening to the letter to the Christians in Philippi just what kind of pastor he is and the open heart that a pastor shares with those put in their charge.

Philippians 1:1-11

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you, <sup>4</sup> constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup> because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of

you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup>For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup>And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight <sup>10</sup>to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup>having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Exercising the gift of being a pastor requires prayer, gentleness, and openness to God and the person or persons in need. It is an excellent gift to have for a community's pastoral care and outreach ministries, but may be exercised outside of any organizational structure all across the community.

**Prayer** is another one of those basic constructs of the Christian life, like Faith, that is available and appropriate for all persons, but it is also a particular gift of the Holy Spirit. We are called to a life of prayer, but some have a particular gift. I recall meeting a Cistercian monk who explained to me that prayer was his work for God and that he spent at least four hours in prayer every day. That's a gift, a gift that is distinct from the prayer life that God calls all of us to share in and practice.

The Greek root, *enteuxis*, means conference, petition, a bringing together, or intervention on another's behalf. The definition of this spiritual gift is that it is the extraordinary ability to know when, how, and for whom or what to pray with effective results.

The persons with this ability characteristically feel a compelling need to pray for another, for others, or for a situation. Persons with a gift for prayer stick with it until they sense a release, an answer, a way forward, or a deep sense of the peace of God. Unlike regular Christian prayer, this form of praying persists until something happens. Gifted pray-ers are prompted by a sense of the Holy Spirit who often reveals to them the special need to pray for others.

Many such persons also have a gift of a special prayer language that facilitates their intercessions, as a means of concentration and a sign of God's presence in their prayer. It may be heavenly language or singing or a way of speaking that stills the soul to God's presence and God's urgings. For them, praying is a vital part ministry and not idle words or nods in God's direction. It is meaningful, joyful, fulfilling, life-giving work designed to accomplish something. Yet they do not delight so much in bringing God to act on the needs of others as they do in bringing others and their needs into the presence of God.

Persons with a gift for prayer are very helpful in support of more active ministries, though, like administrators, they may not be effective at the actual work. Having a person steeped in the life of prayer is excellent for discerning the way forward, keeping spirits up in difficult moments, and celebrating God's actions. Persons with the gift of prayer are a great support to leadership, lay and ordained, and I would suggest that these persons hold the leaders and the community in their daily prayer for support and encouragement and for receiving the vision of God.

Prayer is a critical part of Jesus' life and the first part of the pattern of His ministry because it all involved prayer and action. Jesus stays so connected to His Father that He can claim that nothing He says or does is outside the purposes and direction of His Father. All of Jesus' life and ministry follows some pattern where prayer and action are related. From the start of His ministry in His temptations in the wilderness before beginning His public ministry to praying in the garden before going to the cross. It is the reminder of the importance of prayer for all of us, but particularly for a person with a gift of prayer. Here's a moment where we see Jesus' pattern of prayer and action.

Luke 4:38-44

<sup>38</sup> After leaving the synagogue he entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked him about her. <sup>39</sup> Then he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them.

<sup>40</sup> As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them.

<sup>41</sup> Demons also came out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah.

<sup>42</sup> At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowds were looking for him; and when they reached him, they wanted to prevent him from leaving them.

<sup>43</sup> But he said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." <sup>44</sup> So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea.

***Prayer-Praise Language*** or ***Tongues*** is commonly known as *glossolalia* and refers to a language or languages of prayer and praise. Usually people refer to it as speaking in tongues, but I prefer calling it prayer-praise language because it better describes the most persistent application of the gift. In other words, prayer-praise language is a gift that frees the mind from the structure of sentences to allow persons with this gift to pray to and offer praise to God.

The Greek word *glossolalia* is a combination of two words: *glossa* meaning tongue and *lalia* signifying the utterance of sound. The word does not appear in the New Testament, but has come to be used to describe the phenomenon of tongues Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 12-14. A definition of the spiritual gift is the extraordinary ability to pray and to praise God with beneficial wordless phrases or utterances no familiar to known languages, and with such a joy-filled intimacy with Christ that faith is strengthened and ministries become effective. It is a confusing gift and one that Paul strictly urges people to use privately or with someone with the gift of Interpretation and never to hold as a requirement for being a Christian.

Persons gifted with *glossolalia* have a very real and active prayer life. They are inclined to pray out loud, involving the entire body. They tend to pray with a vision of health and wholeness. Usually, they begin praying in their known language and then move into a higher level of prayer, which requires less effort and cognitive thought. It cannot be taught, but is, like all the other gifts, is initiated by the Holy Spirit working in and through an individual. It may manifest itself in public settings, but is almost always a private, personal prayer language given to individuals by the grace of God for their edification and the building of their faith and relationship with God. Some churches experience *glossolalia* in public settings, but for it to be effective, it requires someone or some persons to interpret. Still, the gift is best exercised in one's private, prayer life with God.

Here are a couple of moments in scripture when this gift is at work.

1 Samuel 10:10-11

<sup>10</sup>When they were going from there to Gibeah, a band of prophets met him; and the spirit of God possessed him, and he fell into a prophetic frenzy along with them. <sup>11</sup>When all who knew him before saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

1 Corinthians 14:1-25

Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup>For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. <sup>3</sup>On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. <sup>4</sup>Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church. <sup>5</sup>Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. <sup>6</sup>Now, brothers and sisters, if I

come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? <sup>7</sup> It is the same way with lifeless instruments that produce sound, such as the flute or the harp. If they do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is being played? <sup>8</sup> And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? <sup>9</sup> So with yourselves; if in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup> There are doubtless many different kinds of sounds in the world, and nothing is without sound. <sup>11</sup> If then I do not know the meaning of a sound, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup> So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. <sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive. <sup>15</sup> What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also. <sup>16</sup> Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not built up. <sup>18</sup> I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; <sup>19</sup> nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. <sup>20</sup> Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults. <sup>21</sup> In the law it is written,

“By people of strange tongues  
and by the lips of foreigners  
I will speak to this people;  
yet even then they will not listen to me,”

says the Lord. <sup>22</sup> Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. <sup>23</sup> If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? <sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. <sup>25</sup> After the secrets of the unbeliever’s heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, “God is really among you.”

The gift is present in God’s Church and is fruitful in private worship always and in some instances in public worship. Either way it comes as a gift from God.

**Prophecy** comes from the Greek word *propheteia*. It means revealing, manifesting, showing forth, making known, divulging, speaking out, or announcing vital information needed for spiritual living and development. It is the extraordinary ability to link Biblical truths with God's will for today's living and to be an instrument of revealing or interpreting previous or current messages from God for righteous and just living in today's world. It does not work in the common use of prophecy as "predicting" of future events, but more of a forth telling of the truths of God for living in right relationship now.

The gifted persons are usually articulate and are particularly concerned with issues of justice and injustice within a church community and in the world surrounding the community. As with persons gifted with mercy, prophets easily identify with victims of injustice or social ignorance. Normally, the person with the gift of prophecy has a broad view of God's kingdom and righteousness, both spiritual and physical, and, like the prophets of the Bible, are concerned with the interconnection of the two.

Theologically, prophets are less interested in Biblical content as application and they have a strong sense of the end of time in mind when they speak and teach. From Matthew 25, they notice that nothing escapes the notice and judgment of Christ. All that is done, good and bad, has a one-to-one correlation in their relationship with God both now and in an age to come.

The writing prophets in the Bible as well as prophets like Samuel, Elijah and Elishah have, at times, some predictive utterances, but the majority of their work is speaking forth in the community against idolatry and in teaching the community about the injustices they are practicing or the ways in which they are setting aside God's laws in favor of their own ways. Here's a predictive utterance from the prophet Isaiah about the coming of the Messiah.

Isaiah 42:1-4

42 Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my spirit upon him;  
he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
<sup>2</sup> He will not cry or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street;  
<sup>3</sup> a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice.  
<sup>4</sup> He will not grow faint or be crushed  
until he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Here's a prophetic word from the prophet Amos about the righteousness that God expects from God's people.

Amos 5:21-24

- <sup>21</sup> I hate, I despise your festivals,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
- <sup>22</sup> Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals  
I will not look upon.
- <sup>23</sup> Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
- <sup>24</sup> But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5-7) is a teaching about the Christian life and is presented in prophetic tone, speaking out about the different life God calls us to live.

Good preaching, good teaching, good living, outreach ministry is all tied up with the gift of the prophet calling into existence a different way of living and a different kind of community than the world so often presents. The prophet may be lay or ordained and is called to teaching and action in response to the Word or direction given to them by God. Again, like all the gifts, it is a gift to be wielded gently and graciously.

*Serving* is another of those activities that is at the core of all Christian life. In fact, it is part of the purpose for the Holy Spirit sending gifts upon the Christian community so that we may grow together in that “serving love” or agape love St. Paul so eloquently describes in 1 Corinthians 13. All of us are called to serve as Christ has served us, lovingly and sometimes sacrificially.

The Greek word for service is *diakonia*. It is a God-centered gift that manifests itself in various ways. As a gift, it is the extraordinary ability to elevate any needed ministry or act that aids the church or another person to a deeper quality of worship and sense of holiness. *Diakonia* is often translated in English as ministry and the word suggests a humble and lowly state – not inferior, but gratefully humble. Humility, however, was not the original Greek understanding of the word. During the time of Jesus, *diakonia* (service) was used to describe a social position of self-abasement or forced humiliation represented by waiting on tables, serving food and wine, or cleaning up after meals. Jesus transformed the meaning as the model for how we should serve one another in coming down from His heavenly glory to live as one of us and at the Last Supper, when He knelt and washed His first followers feet as a sign of a different kind of greatness to which we are all called.

Men and women with the gift of service will respond to any need without concern for social importance or rank. They respond not out of the apparent needs of others, but as an act of worship to God. To them, the worship of God goes beyond one-hour on Sunday morning to all the other hours of the week. Their service to anyone or any group is seen as an act of worship, a service to Christ and their strength and persistence is clearly a gift, since persons with this gift seem so inexhaustible in their service to others. Still, none of us have inexhaustible resources and a life of prayer and rest is required for the server to be at their best.

Persons with the serving gift can be involved in any ministry in the church, though they work best under the direction of others or under the direction of the mission of the church itself. Leaders lead and administrators organize, but servants are all about the tasks of ministry in all of its forms. Sometimes, the gifts and ministry of persons with serving gifts are overlooked by the church. Be advised that we do this to our own detriment as Christian community falls apart without a host of persons serving God and keeping the community running.

The story cycle of Joseph in Genesis (see Genesis 37 and following) presents a wonderful example of a follower of God using their gifts in service to others and in connectedness to God. Jesus is consistently teaching about our call to servanthood in direct words and in parables, but the moment at the Last Supper is the prime example and so is included here.

John 13:1-17

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. <sup>2</sup>The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon

Iscariot to betray him. And during supper <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup> got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. <sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." <sup>8</sup> Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." <sup>12</sup> After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Jesus promises that when we serve we will be like Him and though we may not have rewards in this life, we are storing up treasures in heaven, even as we are treasuring those around us by our serving.

**Teaching** comes from the Greek word *didaskalia*, which means to teach, to instruct, to clarify, to elucidate, to illuminate, or to simplify. As a spiritual gift, teaching is a ministry of instructing and clarifying things about God and our response to God under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This gift is the extraordinary ability to discern, analyze, and deliver Biblical and other spiritual truths in an effort to help others to comprehend and accept the clear calling of God to live justly and righteously.

Communication is the key to the power of this gift and it is a two-way flow – the communicator and the receiver or responder. The person gifted with teaching has the ability to communicate to the degree that the hearers will understand what is being taught. And what is being taught in whatever form is the presence of the living Christ.

The spiritual gift of teaching is different from secular models of teaching. That is, it is not merely imparting knowledge, not merely pouring some amount of information into another's head. It carries a deeply relational feature that causes the teacher to identify with their students on a personal level, one that energizes the heart and the mind. There is a partnership with the learners.

The person with the gift of teaching displays three qualities of familiarity with God and the material, whether in public or in written form. First, there is an unquestionable familiarity with God. God's presence is a large part of what the teacher presents. Second, there is a unique relationship to the subject matter. The teacher knows the material in personal ways and can understand how others may receive it in other, personal ways that may be different from the teacher. And third, there's a bond that connects the teacher with the learners that transcends the more secular models we are used to.

Persons with gifts for teaching are helpful in all areas of ministry to keep the church on track and to remember why we are doing what we are doing. They can be helpful in pastoral ministries as guides for others. The best place, of course, is in sharing the knowledge of God and the Christian life with persons of all ages. When you are putting together your Sunday School, youth programs and adult education, please seek persons who have the gift for teaching.

So, there are myriad of stories about the gift of teaching all through the Bible and so I will limit this review to one in which the teaching is so remarkable that someone's life is changed and one about Jesus that describes the authority that comes with the gift. The first comes when the prophet Nathan rebukes David for David's adultery and murder of Bathsheba's husband. It is a word of prophecy, certainly, but the teaching is remarkable.

2 Samuel 12:1-14

<sup>1</sup> and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup> The rich man had very many flocks and herds; <sup>3</sup> but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter

to him. <sup>4</sup> Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." <sup>5</sup> Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; <sup>6</sup> he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." <sup>7</sup> Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; <sup>8</sup> I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. <sup>9</sup> Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. <sup>10</sup> Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. <sup>11</sup> Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. <sup>12</sup> For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." <sup>13</sup> David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan said to David, "Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die."

Jesus is perhaps the most gifted teacher in the history of the world and the people who here notice this. At the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the people listening to Jesus have this response:

Matthew 7:28-29

<sup>28</sup> Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

That's the effect a person with the gift of teaching has with their listeners or students. We all teach in our various positions in life so it's good to know that and to learn how to be good teachers, but those of us who connect so well need to be open to opportunities to teach and be part of the educational ministries of our churches.

**Wisdom** comes for the Greek word *sophia* and means a practical application of knowledge, divine or natural, to specific situations that call on God's grace. Wisdom is the extraordinary ability to make concrete and specific applications of divine knowledge received directly from God. It is not merely a flash of divine insight from time to time, but a way of approaching the world that calls on the truths of God.

Persons with the gift of wisdom are able to act, speak, write, or draw to apply God's eternal truths to everyday realities. They often appear to have an uncanny ability to make statements that, at first, may not make total sense, but eventually solve serious problems simply and completely. An example would be St. Augustine's often repeated phrase, "Love and do what you will" or "Love God and sin boldly." The clarity and simplicity that come with the gift of wisdom is sometimes embarrassing, but when we truly love God, we will do whatever God wants and that will please both God and us.

Charismatically wise persons cut through to the real issue quickly and effectively, asking both practical questions and sensible suggestions that have a sting of realism. They also have the ability to see divine and spiritual significance in seemingly insignificant or inconsequential events and situations. They perceive God's glory and presence in ordinary things and persons and expect God's presence in every activity and every person.

Wisdom comes to all of us through the school of experience and "hard knocks", but the gift of wisdom does not require experience. It requires prayer and study and an openness to the Spirit's leading. It is a gift that is so helpful in church leadership, either elected or as an advisor or counselor to those in leadership or those seeking to accomplish some important task on behalf of God. It is a humble gift when used appropriately and often comes with a gentle good humor since the insights often redirect the decision process or the ministry of the church and its leadership. The gentle, good humor may be the sign that someone is offering Godly wisdom from their gift as opposed to worldly wisdom or experience which, while helpful, can leave itself open to argument and second guessing.

The WORD of God is often presented in the scripture as the wisdom of God and one can peruse the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes or Jesus' teaching for tidbits of wisdom, but the gift is just that, a gift and one that comes from God. We need both in this life, along with our experience, but when the gift of wisdom enters in, so comes the Holy Spirit. Here are a couple of examples of wisdom that come from God, one with Solomon, and one the conversation between Jesus and the Jewish leader, Nicodemus. One is very clear in human terms and one turns our understanding on end.

1 Kings 3:16-28

<sup>16</sup> Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. <sup>17</sup> The one woman said, "Please, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house." <sup>18</sup> Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together; there was no one else with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house. <sup>19</sup> Then this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. <sup>20</sup> She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while

your servant slept. She laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. <sup>21</sup> When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne.” <sup>22</sup> But the other woman said, “No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours.” The first said, “No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine.” So they argued before the king.

<sup>23</sup> Then the king said, “The one says, ‘This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead’; while the other says, ‘Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one.’” <sup>24</sup> So the king said, “Bring me a sword,” and they brought a sword before the king. <sup>25</sup> The king said, “Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other.” <sup>26</sup> But the woman whose son was alive said to the king—because compassion for her son burned within her—“Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!” The other said, “It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.” <sup>27</sup> Then the king responded: “Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother.” <sup>28</sup> All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice.

### John 3:1-21

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. <sup>6</sup> What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? <sup>11</sup> “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

## Chapter Five

### Organizing for Church our Gifts

#### All Have Gifts

God has given us gifts to enjoy and to use on behalf of the community of the faithful and for the good of others – all others. All of us have been given gifts and if St. Paul is correct, and it appears that he is correct, then there is no hierarchy of gifts. All come to us as gifts from God and are therefore not ours to compare or to wield outside the Spirit's leading. We are one body with many parts and each part, working in concert with the other parts or gifts, make up the whole body. We would now be whole were it not for all the gifts being present and being exercised for the good of the community and for the good of the world.

St. Paul confirms this reality in his letters and especially in 1 Corinthians 12 :1-31.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>2</sup> You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. <sup>3</sup> 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. <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. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <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. <sup>11</sup> All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <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, <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have

the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. <sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

We, who have been given gifts, are called to exercise them in humility and graciousness according to the needs of the community and the particular calling of God. This is both a freeing and challenging aspect of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is freeing because it means that the gifts we have been given and are exercising have important values, however humble they may seem. It is challenging because our humanity gets in the way. It gets in the way when we define ourselves by how important our gifts are versus remembering that our identity comes from being God's beloved child. When we start defining ourselves by the importance of our gift or what we are able to do, even in church, then we have a tendency to put ourselves before others and cause animosity in relation to others and to their gifts. It is challenging, too, because we live in a culture where hierarchy often reigns and so we either see our gifts as better than others or give over our authority and power to others because we're not sure our gifts are as important.

So, when a person has gifts for leadership and exercises them, their gift is not more important than the person who is using their gift for mercy, even though the leader may get more air time than the person practicing mercy. Or, when a person is exercising their gifts for teaching and develops a "following" because their gift can be so helpful, they are not more important than the person who is exercising their gift for administration or prayer or serving. All of the gifts make up the Body of Christ or the church community. It is when we allow all the gifts to be used and when we revel or rejoice in the differing gifts being used that the Body excels, grows, is most effective. And while some gifts are more personal and not a requirement for a Christian community to exist, all the gifts are important and need to be exercised.

### **Gifts and the Organization of the Church**

The gifts that we have been given by God are important in how we go about organizing our church. Large or small, each community has been gifts to be the Body of Christ and to exercise ministries within the Church and out there in the world. We may not have all the gifts at any one time, but God always gives us the gifts we need.

So why don't we organize our common work according to the variety of gifts that God has given? Too often we "bunch" gift sets for particular areas of ministries. Pastoral care ministries are filled with persons who have gifts of mercy and serving and pastoring, but not a single person has the gifts of the administrator for organizing the ministry or the gifts of a teacher to keep the work fresh and deep. Finance committees rarely have someone with a gift of prayer to keep the work connected to God and Christian Education

committees forget that they might need an exhorter or two for those teaching middle schoolers who don't let you see they're learning all that much. I can't tell you how many times I've sat in committees where the gifts were bunched.

In each area of ministry, the church needs to consider balancing the gifts according to the actual work or ministry, but also to help people grow in their faith, be encouraged, stay organized and focused, clear about the direction God is directing them. A committee dealing with outreach ministries might consider having the committee made up of a leader to direct, an administrator to organize, a prophet to remind the group of the importance of the work, someone or ones with the gifts of mercy and serving who are out there in the field, a teacher to keep things fresh, someone with the gift of faith to deepen the trust in God's gifts and God at work through the committee, and someone with the gift of giving because, after all, the work often requires people giving of their wealth to make things happen.

Just as all have been given gifts and the gifts make up the Body, so each individual area of ministry needs the variety of gifts to keep it healthy and thriving.

### **Gifts and the Direction of the Church**

A Church has many functions. It is a place of worship, where Christians and Seekers come to hear the word of God, pray, give thanks, receive forgiveness, share in communion, and worship God. Church is a place of love and fellowship where persons may come and feel a part of something greater than themselves and care and be cared for. Church is a force for goodness and justice in the wider community so that those outside the community may be invited to know Christ and receive gifts that the church has to give. Church is a launching pad for Christians to return to the world in the knowledge and experience of God's love so that they may live faithful lives and bring others into the love of Christ that we are coming to know.

That takes a lot of varying gifts to make this happen and while a church cannot "do" everything, it can do some things well or very well. How do we discern what the Spirit is calling our church to be and do and accomplish? Well, knowing the gifts that are present in a Christian community may be a way to discern the specific ministry or ministries of a church. For while God gives a variety of gifts so that the community is whole, the Spirit may be giving specific gifts for a specific time of ministry in the life of a church.

Oh we need, leaders and pastors and teachers and merciful persons and exhorters and pray-ers, but what if we noticed that God was given us a large number of people with the gift for prayer. Might that indicate that that church has a particular ministry for prayer? Or what if there were a large number of persons with the gift for teaching. Might that indicate that that church has a ministry of teaching beyond the sort of regular teaching that is part of the Christian community? Or what if a church were given an unusual supply of leaders? Might that suggest that that particular church has a broader ministry in the world around it to help shape the community, the business and even the local government in ways that would look like the community God is working to build? If our

community had an unusual number of evangelists, noisy and quiet, then perhaps God is calling us to reach out to others and to grow the Christian community of which we are a part.

I think the Spirit works just this way. After we have identified the gifts that help make us and organize us as our particular location of the Body of Christ, we may look at our gifts to see where God might be calling us as a community of the whole and what works God may be calling us to in this particular moment.

So talk with one another and listen to one another about the gifts God has given you, not just for the organization to keep the church vibrant, but as the means for hearing God's call on the community as a whole. The outward focus is always helpful in the Christian community. It helps us be gracious when little things don't go well and is consistent with Jesus' call to make disciples of all nations.

## Chapter Six

### The Most Excellent Way

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to all of us as individuals and as Christian communities. It is the Spirit that empowers us for the work God has given us to do, enlivens us to God's purposes and sustains in times of great joy and great challenge. We give thanks to God for these gifts for without them we cannot be Christ's Body in the world and we would be far, far less effective than we are. Imagine trying to live as Christians and as a Christian community without the gifts of the Spirit among us, empowering us, shaping who we are and we are becoming.

The gifts of the Spirit come to us, but they are subject to or secondary to one gift. The gifts of the Spirit are aligned with one gift, with one way of being that colors and shapes all that we are about as individual Christians and as Christian communities. That one gift is love and a specific kind of love, a serving love or in Greek *agape*. *Agape* is one of the four words the Greeks had for love. It is not the love of passion (*eros*). It is not the love of friendship (*philia*). It is not the love of a parent to a child (*storge*). *Agape* is a charitable and serving way of love. It is a gift love that expects nothing in return. Here's how St. Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 13 after his discourse on the gifts of the Spirit and being the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:21-13:13

<sup>31</sup> But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. <sup>13</sup> If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. <sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

The gifts of the Spirit are activated by God in love and for love. We are called to use them in love and for the love of God and one another. So when we think about how we are exercising our gifts or when to exercise our gift, it's important to ask the question as to whether we are acting in love and seeking to grow and grow in love. The gifts are

ways that we know God's love and using our gifts should always be a means for spreading the Christ-like love that we know from the Gospels, from our own experiences of God and from St. Paul's description of what love, Christian love really is.

So as you are discerning and using your gifts and seeing the Body of Christ grow and flourish as the many parts of the Body exercise their gifts, remember that love is over all and through all.

## **Resources**

All scriptural references come from the NRSV translation of the Bible.

All Greek words and partial definitions come from Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, abridged in one volume, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. William B. Erdman's Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1985.