

Sermon – January 16, 2022
“Got Spiritual Gifts?”
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Good morning and welcome to another Sunday in the season of Epiphany. We are still climbing up transfiguration mountain, where we will witness Jesus' glory. We have much to learn as we begin our walk with Jesus in his ministry.

Now hopefully those who received gifts during the holidays have had the opportunity to use them. They were not given to be unwrapped, thanks shared and then left under a tree, but to be used for whatever purpose they were intended. Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected, securing for us the gift of salvation. Jesus is now at the right hand of God the Father, but has also given each of us through the Holy Spirit at our baptism another gift. This is a gift for us to use in ministry. Each of us has a gift that we need to unwrap and put to use in ministry, showing the love of Jesus to others through our gift or gifts.

As we begin to look at this idea of spiritual gifts, we want to separate them from talents. Talents are those abilities that we are given or come to us through our parents and ancestors. All of us have talents. The music talent that was very prevalent in my family skipped over me, for the most part, and I got other talents such as a talent for mathematics. Not an extreme mathematical talent but some talent to think mathematically. All of us have talents. If you think about what you do and like to do, you should be able to identify some talents that you have been given. We are able to use our talents apart from the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that we cannot use them under the Spirit's guidance and empowerment, but our talents are always available to us and can be improved with work. I will use music as an example. Some musicians use their musical talent to make money in a part of the music industry that is not connected to Jesus. Our talents are inherited at birth and we can choose to develop them over the course of our lives, or

we can allow them to remain undeveloped.¹ Talents bring temporary results that are only in effect while we are alive, and our talents often fade with time and as we age. My talent for math has been greatly reduced from lack of use. Now I am not slamming the door on talents. Keep in mind that talents can also be used to give glory to God, and the Holy Spirit can use our talents to help us love others and bring them into the kingdom of God. Probably one of the best examples that comes to mind is Eric Liddle, a talented yet unorthodox Olympic runner whose story was made known to many in the book and movie, *Chariots of Fire*. If you have not seen that movie, I would recommend that you make time to watch it. Liddle used his talent for running to give God glory. And our musicians who have shared with us their musical talents this morning are also examples of those who use their talents to build up others in God's kingdom.

By contrast, gifts of the Spirit are supernatural. They enable us to act in ways that are not natural for us. Spiritual gifts are given to us at our new birth, and, throughout our life as believers, we may be given additional gifts of the Spirit. These gifts come from the Holy Spirit. These gifts are only given to believers. They are not given to those who do not follow Christ. Spiritual gifts may be used for the benefit of nonbelievers, such as healing, but are given only to Christ followers. These gifts cannot function apart from the presence of the Holy Spirit. We are not in command of these gifts to use them as we please. We are to use them for the building up of believers and not for our own edification. Spiritual gifts, in contrast to talents, work at a supernatural level and their use brings eternal results. Each of us received one or more of these gifts at our new birth and it is always available for use, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to build up the body of believers.

We heard a list of spiritual gifts read this morning from 1 Corinthians. This list is not a complete list of all the spiritual gifts. Paul includes this list in his letter to the Corinthians for specific reasons as he is teaching them and addressing issues among their church. We should notice all of the gifts listed here by Paul have manifestations of the Spirit; the results of their use can be seen or heard. Easy examples are speaking in tongues and physical healing. When those gifts are used, we can witness the resulting actions. There are other gifts besides those listed in this letter. Let me read another list from Romans 12: "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness." And then let me read a third list from Ephesians starting with

4:11 “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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.” Even these lists are not complete because the Holy Spirit is always working and creating new aspects of gifts to build up the body of Christ. However, these are the primary gifts that we understand from scripture. The lists vary, with some repetition, as Paul is using the lists in his letters not to present a complete picture of the gifts but to address issues in the churches to which he is writing. In Corinthians, while we don’t have a letter from the Corinthians to give us complete and accurate understanding of their issues, from reading Paul’s letter to them, we learn they have some issues with the gifts that have manifestations, especially speaking in tongues. Overall, there are twenty of these gifts. Let me define them for us this morning using definitions developed by Kinghorn. This is the list that was handed out to you this morning.² As we go through these spiritual gifts this morning, mark any that you find interesting.

The first is prophecy. This is applying the biblical revelation with clarity and power as light and truth for the present. These may also be words given to one person for another or for a group of people. The teaching gift is understanding God’s truth and communicating it clearly so others will grasp its relevance and importance for their lives. These are teachers who lead others in the study and sharing of God’s word. Serving is another spiritual gift. The Greek word for serving is diakonia, supporting others through Spirit-inspired service that lifts their loads and frees them for wider ministries. Serving may be a time of humbling ourselves and working alongside others to lift them up in Christ. It differs from serving we see in the world because it is enabled by the Holy Spirit to build up believers for God’s glory and not our own. Next is exhortation. This gift is seen in those who are comforting and encouraging to others, using the ministries of sympathetic understanding and scriptural counsel to call forth right attitudes and actions. We can recognize people who have this gift when after we have been with them, we realize that our soul is lifted, we find joy in our hearts, and we are encouraged among our challenges. These are also the people who will come to you in church and put a hand on your shoulder when you are troubled. I pray that you have people with this gift around you. One of the best encouragers in my life, who is no longer with us, was Jim Slater. If you spent time with Jim, you were encouraged. I have often been blessed by many people with this gift. Another spiritual

gift is giving or sharing. People with this gift share their generous material or financial means to help others and to advance God's work in people's lives and in the church's ministries. Giving aid is another spiritual gift. Those with this gift provide leadership to coordinate the materials and abilities of others to meet the practical needs of people and organizations. Related to the gift of giving aid is the gift of compassion, the ability to sense needs in others, feel sympathy, and cheerfully show mercy and give comfort. You may get an unexpected call from someone with the gift of compassion who is led by the Spirit to reach out to you. People with this gift will often be the one who will come to comfort us in a worship service and may be able to know we are hurting without any discussion or sharing on our part. Next comes the gift of healing. Healing is seen in praying prayers of faith that bring God's healing to sick, frail, or disordered bodies, souls, and relationships. This is physical healing of our bodies or emotional healing of our souls. This is the Holy Spirit working through us to heal people's infirmities and not a gift we are given to use in our will. A related gift is working miracles, again in prayer. Those with this gift are trusting God to work supernaturally in people and circumstances, especially by healing, freeing from evil spirits, and delivering us from dangers. If we are in a prayer group and someone prays for "a hedge of protection" around someone, we may be in the presence of someone with this gift. Next is speaking in tongues, the gift that Paul is writing about to the Corinthians. Speaking in tongues is when one speaks in an unknown language as a means of petition, praise, or thanksgiving. This is not the same as what occurred at Pentecost with the believers there. The tongue is most often unintelligible and is coupled to the next gift, interpretation of tongues. In the body of Christ, we are to remain silent if we have the gift of tongues unless there is someone present who has this gift. They are present to make clear to others the meaning or intent of the utterance of one who speaks in an unknown tongue. This is not translation, but interpretation of what they have said. Next are words of wisdom. With this gift, one receives a Spirit-assisted illumination that enables one to understand and share the mind of the Holy Spirit in a specific circumstance, sometimes for the body and sometimes for a person. Related to this gift is the gift of words of knowledge. This is the gift where we know a fact or circumstance based on direct illumination by the Holy Spirit. Another one of the gifts is the gift of faith. The gift of faith is the Spirit-given ability to believe that because God is able to do wonderful works, we can trust him to bring them to pass in response to prayer and faith. This is not the faith that comes with salvation; this is a supernatural faith that allows mountains to be moved when needed or to continue in faith when prayers for

healing are not answered as we seek healing for our infirmities. The next gift on my list is discernment of spirits. Those with this gift are able to sense whether a teaching or proposed action comes from a divine source, a human source, or an evil source.

We are in the home stretch with our list of spiritual gifts. Did you realize there are so many? Next is apostleship. Those with this gift will be transplanting the Gospel to a new, unevangelized environment to establish a Christian community among unreached people. Then comes the gift of helping, the unselfishly serving of the poor, needy, or disadvantaged people through ministries of practical service. Administration is a spiritual gift. Those with this gift will be leading others by setting goals, planning, organizing, and guiding them in working harmoniously toward a common purpose in God's work. Two more. Next is evangelism. This is not just someone holding crusades for Christ, but it is a special ability to understand the grave condition of unsaved people and lead them to commit their lives to Jesus Christ as their savior. This is seen in one-on-one sharing of the good news with those who have not come into a relationship with Jesus. Evangelism is clearly a gift extended to nonbelievers. And last, but not least is shepherding. Think of this in the terms of a pastor, guardian, shepherd, superintendent, or herdsman. Those with the gift of shepherd will be leading and serving others through the pastoral ministries of teaching, guiding, and nurturing to bring believers to Christian maturity and Christ-likeness.³

One of our challenges with the spiritual gifts is to realize or discover which gift or gifts we might have been given. Every believer has at least one of these gifts and needs to find out which one they have and use it to develop the body of Christ. We are not given these gifts to put them on a shelf. They are to be used for the building of the body of Christ. We might ask, "How do we discover which gift we have been given?" Now there are a lot of online tests that have been developed that may help give us insights into which of these gifts we might have or at least which are interesting to us. Before we had these tests to aid us, the Church was able to discover the gifts present in its body. How did they discover their gifts? First, they opened themselves to God as a channel for God's use. They would approach discovering gifts with a desire to serve God and to be open to a leading God gave them connected to their gift. Next, they would examine their desires for service and ministry. We are to look inward and see where we have a desire to serve. Now whenever I have taken one of the spiritual gifts tests, I end up with shepherd as my number one result. When I take one of these tests, I am trying to answer the

questions so that evangelism and prophecy will be highest on my list of potential gifts. These are gifts that I am interested in receiving. That doesn't seem to happen in the results. These are gifts that I pray for and ask the Holy Spirit to give to me, as Paul instructs us to do.

As we understand our desires that come from God, then we need to identify the needs we see in the church and seek to match our desires to those needs so that we might enter into service. As we serve in any capacity, we should evaluate the results of our service and ministry. We should see if there is fruit associated with our work and if we are actually gifted to serve in the areas we have desires. We also need to obey God's word and learn what Jesus' revelations and actions were that connect to our service and ministry and evaluate our service to see if our use of our gifts is consistent with those discoveries. Finally, we need to listen to other Christians. Very often those around us can see our gifts and help us understand what spiritual gifts we have been given and how we might use those gifts to build up the body of Christ. Our spiritual gift was not given to us to keep hidden away, kept in reserve for emergency use, or to be saved for some distant time. It is given to us to unwrap and use in the kingdom of God, right here, right now. So, explore the possibilities, pray about these gifts, see where you are led, and then start using your gift to serve each other. If you went down the list and found gifts that you are interested in, then engage with the church, learn more about that gift, and try it out to see if it is an interest or a gift from the Holy Spirit. Remember that you have been baptized; you have a gift from the Holy Spirit given at that time. Don't leave it on the shelf, take it down, and use it to build up the body of Christ, loving each other as we use our gifts in this place. Jesus gave us the gift of salvation at a great price, and he has given each of us another gift or gifts to use to love each other. So, take the wrapping off, read the instructions, and try out your gift or gifts.

Pray with me: Come, Holy Spirit, and open our hearts to God's love for us. Stir our hearts to where we are gifted and called to serve each other in this place and in all places where believers gather. Holy Spirit, would you help us to discover the gifts of the Spirit we have been given and give us the courage to use them? In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we pray, Amen

¹ The information on talents is taken from Kinghorn's presentation

² Ibid, this is the same presentation

³ Ibid, these are all taken from Kinghorn's presentation.