

Eaglehawk Uniting Church
Sunday 20th January 2013
Merrill Cole

Spiritual People = Spiritual Gifts (the miracle of grace)

1 Corinthians 12: 1-11 and John 2: 1-11

Have you received a gift from somebody in the last week; month; year?? And did you said 'no thanks' and gave it back?? Do we unconsciously have an image of something wrapped up in pretty paper, maybe with a ribbon or card attached?? Or do we imagine a gift as more that presents and wrapping paper??

I've subtitled today 'the miracle of Grace' because firstly, we need to hold onto the fact that it is only through the Grace of God that we receive anything at all. We often take our gifts for granted; or assume that we should receive what we want; or that we deserve it because we're a 'Christian'. That's dangerous territory - and worth going back to the basics to have a hard look at.

Definition of 'Gift'

There are a number of definitions of 'Gift' in common use today:

1st something given - usually in order to **provide pleasure**, or to show gratitude

2nd a special talent - a natural ability that someone **appears** to have been born with, especially artistic or social skill - often through hard work

3rd the act of giving - the **process** of giving something to somebody

4th something easily gained - obtained or achieved easily (**without exertion** by the recipient)

In all of these definitions we see that it is something given freely, without expectation of return/reimbursement

But - the desire of the giver is always that the gift will be valued by the recipient and be of some use. (Sometimes not ??!!) The gift needs to be received and accepted to make it o realize its worth. The gifts we are given to us from the Spirit far exceed our own personal needs or expectations, and n the Corinthians reading where we are reminded by Paul that we are to accept and use our gifts to the benefit of the whole community for the common good.

We also see in John that we receive an abundance from God. Jesus in that first miracle produced more than 500 litres of wine - that's a 44 gallon drum, or about 2000 glasses worth - and the guests had already finished off the original supply - it was far more than enough for the rest of the party.

We are **all** given spiritual gifts that have the potential to take us from emptiness to excess --- if we are willing to accept these gifts.

So, Why a gift from God??

From the Greek, the word 'Charismata' is the extraordinary operation of the Spirit. It might be only for a short time, and to meet the necessities of a particular place - it could be argued that a better meaning is 'spiritual matters'.

We can see these gifts as our own private miracle, and with it often comes a reluctance to acknowledge or use them. But faith can never be private - these gifts exist for the public, for the 'common good'. Looking at the reading from Corinthians again, it follows on from a 'telling off' hat Paul gives the Church members for being individualistic, and wanting the glory for themselves. Paul gives wise counsel on how to handle problems, and how to re-focus our intentions based on the needs of the community, and apply our desire to draw the focus back to God.

Spiritual gifts are visionary, but need Practical application - from our gifts we see outcomes, or fruits (read Galatians 5). And the list of gifts that is in Corinthians is by no means an exhaustive or prescriptive one - we don't have to fit our gifts neatly into one of those in v 8-10. We need to learn to use our gifts to deal with differences and division. In the UC basis of union there is reference to tolerance and acceptance and acknowledgement that we are on a pilgrimage together as a Christian community.

A question for you ... ***What are your Gifts ????***

Show the Glory of God

Paul's focus in all of his letters to the early Church is one of a top down approach - God in control / giving directions, through the Leadership of the Spirit. This is ***BIG PICTURE STUFF***: Everything we do should focus back to God - Creator, Incarnation, and Advocate. We need to focus back to the Giver of all the Gifts we receive.

As we read of Jesus actions in John, we need to look to use our rituals for practical use, to show the miracles in everyday life. We need to see that the genuine 'spiritual gift' gives recognition & praise to God, and acknowledge that God can use the tainted or the 'polluted' for gracious outcomes. If the Spirit only bestowed spiritual gifts on perfect people, ***we'd still be waiting***. Our spiritual gifts have to be seen from a Theological perspective. We need to be aware of the desired outcome of our gifts, and acknowledge the source of our gifts in their use. The outcomes are what lead to a Glorified Christ - these are not able to be caught on camera - but need to be taken in perspective and the context of why the gift existed in the first place. Our gifts are given to us to share and grow the Christian experience and witness to God.

A second question ... ***Why do You have your Gifts ????***

The Gifts we receive

The most important gift we receive is LIFE. We need to acknowledge that there is a time to do what is needed, and a time to move on - accept and change.

The Miracle at Cana began to show the true identity of Jesus by giving a glimpse of the true power and authority of Jesus which began the transition from Judaism to Christianity. Our life miracles show our identity in fanning our desire to be Christ-like, that brings about a change from the self centered-ness of human nature to a desire to contribute to the wellness and growth of our community. In both of the passages we read and in many other places through the bible we are instructed to use our gifts as a building up, not a tearing down.

If we look a little deeper at the list of 'charismata' that are listed in Corinthians, we can see three types of gift. This is more important than the examples given in the list of gifts.

1. Personal abilities (wisdom & knowledge);

2. 'Faith' abilities (trust, healing & miracles);
3. Abilities for Ministry (prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, tongues and their interpretation).

All are given by the Spirit and each is as important as another. They are not a hierarchy of gifts or for 'spiritual status'. For a well functioning community there is a need for all types of gifts. This is explained further in the next section of Corinthians - read verses 12-31.

The key is in the identification and wise use of our gifts. Over time our gifts are likely to change (me up here??? Never!!!) Think of how you have changed over the years, what you do now that is second nature that once you would have thought was out of the question. And of course it is also true of the saying - use it or lose it - we need to use our gifts or they become useless - of no benefit to ourselves or others. Again - we have these gifts for the benefit of others - the common needs of the (Christian) community

Just as Jesus Glory needs to be seen in context, so the Work of the Church is not able to be caught on camera - but felt in the sense of unity and harmony that is only experienced through a common focus of purpose and function.

Another question ... ***What are you doing with Your Gifts ????***

Like the miracle of the wine, Jesus has more miracles for us, and the best is still to come. To finish we read 1 Corinthians 12: v 4-7 again.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

- ξ Accept the gifts you have received
- ξ Take your gifts beyond Sunday, and share them with the world.
- ξ Use your gift for the very best you can, to the Glory of God.

Amen

Resources

- Alexander, P & D. (2009). *The Lion Handbook to the Bible. 4th edition*. Oxford: Wilkinson House.
- Broding, L. <http://www.word-sunday.com/Files/c/2-c/SR-2-c.html> . Accessed January 2013
- Clendenin, D. <http://journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20100111JJ.shtml> . Accessed January 2013
- Findlayson, B. <http://www.lectionarystudies.com/sunday2ce.html> . Accessed January 2013
- Gibbs, J G.. <http://www.env-steward.com/lectionary/lectc/c-ep2-g.htm> . Accessed January 2013
- Gibbs, J G. <http://www.env-steward.com/lectionary/lectc/c-ep2-nt.htm> . Accessed January 2013
- HarperOne. 2006. *The HarperCollins Study Bible, Revised Edition*. HarperCollins Publishers. San Francisco.
- Harrisville, R. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=1/17/2010 . Accessed January 2013
- Lewis, K. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=1/17/2010 . Accessed January 2013
- Loader, W. <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/LkEpiphany2.htm> . Accessed January 2013
- Long, B. <http://www.drbilllong.com/Lectionary/ICor12.html> . Accessed January 2013
- Stoffregen, B P. <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/john2x1.htm> . Accessed January 2013