

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, January 17, 2010  
Rev. John Tapscott

**"MANY GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT"**

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

One of my pet peeves of the Christmas season has to do with some of the form letters we receive, mostly from relatives. This is how they go. At the top there's a beautiful family picture - Mom and Dad and the two kids and the dog, sitting in their spacious living room beautifully decorated for Christmas. The text begins: "We had a great year with wonderful accomplishments and experiences." The letter goes on to talk about promotions and achievements and high marks in school and gold medal graduations, university acceptances athletic victories, and involvement in activities designed to save the planet, house renovations, family vacations to exotic places, topped off by the purchase of property on a lake in Muskoka. And it usually ends with "Hope you had a good year, too."

It's all true, I'm sure, and people have reason to be proud, but as I read this, I feel smaller and more inadequate by the moment and think, "Gee, I'm just glad my family and I made it through the year in one piece."

Does it ever seem to you that some people get more than their fair share of gifts? Maybe it even seems to happen in the church. Paul was writing to the church in Corinth which was having some disputes over gifts. Paul addresses the issue in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapters 11, 12 & 13. Now the Holy Spirit had been very active in the Corinthian church, distributing spiritual gifts to its members. Some Christians had been given high profile gifts, like superior knowledge and wisdom, or the power to heal, or the ability to speak in tongues and to interpret tongues, or to prophecy, by which Paul probably means to preach powerful sermons. And these people were getting all the glory in the church. Or perhaps they were glorifying themselves, putting themselves above those who had received more mundane gifts. It was causing divisions and creating classes within the church. And so Paul says in chapter 12:4-6, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities; but it is the same God who activates them in everyone." These verses will guide our thinking today as we consider the topic of "Many Gifts, One Spirit."

The first thing we need to see is this: ***God gives a gift to each of us.*** There

are varieties of gifts, and God makes sure that each of us has at least one gift to contribute to the common good. This is true whether it's a natural talent which contributes to the welfare of society, or a spiritual gift for the common good and the upbuilding of the church. In verse 11, Paul writes, "...the Spirit allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses."

Now it's true that some people have more gifts than others. Some, as I say, seem inordinately gifted. You recall that Jesus once told a parable about that - how one servant was given 5 talents, another 3 and yet another 1 talent. And to be honest most of us fall into that one or maybe two talent category. Again, it refers to the natural gifts **and** to the spiritual gifts he gives. But God has not left anyone without a talent or a gift. God has not left any Christian without a spiritual gift. Verse 7: "To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

And because no one has every gift we need one another in the church. There are varieties of activities and varieties of services. Clergy have some gifts needed in the church, but not all. You sometimes read in church publications ads placed by churches looking for a minister. One went something like this:

"St. Friendly's Church is seeking a "walk on water" minister to work among us for 40 hours a week. The successful candidate will be a warm, approachable individual able to inspire and lead the congregation with a grand vision; preach dynamic Biblical sermons relevant to daily living and world events; give strong leadership to youth and Christian education programs; keep abreast of current Biblical scholarship and lead stimulating small group studies; provide direction to the Official Board and its standing Committees; regularly visit the sick and the shut-in and others as required; counsel those in distress; develop outreach and evangelism programs in order to grow church membership; conduct all weddings, funerals and baptisms; have strong administrative and supervisory skills; fill in as choir director and organist when required; and raise the church's profile by involvement in the community. Unfortunately, at this time, due to financial constraints, St. Friendly's Church can pay only the minimum salary."

Now I've been here for nearly ten years and I can't remember what Streetville's ad was like, but if it was like that, I sure wouldn't be here. No one would be, I'm afraid. No one individual has all those gifts. But you know what - God has made sure that within the congregation all the necessary gifts are present, not in one individual, but in the body of Christ. Now your gift is likely different than the gift of the person sitting beside you. Each of us has a God-given gift unique to our own personality. And as we join together in the Body of Christ and use our individual gifts the church comes closer to what God intends.

Our gifts glorify God, build up the church and serve the common good. Through the Holy Spirit God gives each Christian a spiritual gift. "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; varieties of services, but the same Lord."

That's why comparing gifts and talents in the church only causes problems like jealousy, strife, dissension and division. The biggest problem with comparing gifts is that it leads to ingratitude. Rather than thanking God for the gift he has given you, you begin to think that he has shortchanged you. You actually start to resent God. When this happens, it's almost as if we're saying to God that he didn't know what he was doing when he made us. But remember the gift God gave you is just right for you and is required to make the church function as it should.

Furthermore, remember that to those to whom much is given, much is required. If you have one gift or one talent, don't bury it because others have more or different gifts. And if you are a five talent person, then you have been given a great responsibility. God holds us accountable for the use of whatever gifts he has given us. So let's put away all the comparing and envious spirit and rejoice in the variety of gifts we have here in the Body of Christ. And most of all, let's use them for the common good and the upbuilding of the church. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit."

That brings us to the next thing. The Spirit not only gives us gifts, **but also activates our gifts.** "There are varieties of activities; but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."

Now we have no choice over the gifts we are given. Much as I might like to be able to play music like our own John Shillingberg, it's not going to happen. God didn't give me that gift. That was obvious after two months of piano lessons as a kid. But God did give me some other gifts. We don't pick and choose our gifts. But we do choose to cooperate with God in their activation. In fact, it seems that the Spirit generally doesn't activate our spiritual gifts without our desire and our cooperation.

Often it takes trial and error to discover your special gift. But if you ask God to help you find it and to activate it within you he will. And when you use your spiritual gift, whether singing a solo, teaching, administering, leading, organizing, or reaching out, you feel a sense of accomplishment. You know this is what God has called you and gifted you to do.

Unfortunately, the Church suffers because many of the spiritual gifts that God has given his people remain inactive. So here's the question. Have you let God's Spirit activate your spiritual gift? This is a good question to ask ourselves right now as we seek willing servants to take on tasks in the church for the upcoming

year. Has the Spirit of God activated your spiritual gift? He will, if you are open to following God's leading and your life is committed to doing God's will. The Spirit will lead you to know your what spiritual gift is and will activate it within you. And when your spiritual gift is activated the Body of Christ is blessed. So are you.

Finally this: We've been speaking about the gifts that God has given us for the common good and for the blessing of the Body of Christ. These are both natural and spiritual gifts. And God will hold us accountable for the use of our gifts once we get to heaven. We will actually be rewarded there for the use of our gifts. The one talent person who used their talent faithfully will be rewarded more highly than the five talent person who buried those talents.

But here's the thing. **It is not our gifts or the use or non-use of our gifts that will get us to heaven. What gets us to heaven is God's gift of Christ our Saviour**, whose birth we celebrated at Christmas and whose death and resurrection we will proclaim and celebrate in just a few months time. The wonder of the Christian gospel is that it puts us all on level ground before God. No matter how gifted we are, no matter how successful or unsuccessful, no matter what, we all fall short of the glory of God, As one, we stand before God with empty hands and nothing to boast of. Without God's mercy and forgiveness we are heading for an eternity without God, a Godless, empty eternity. But thank God, he gave Christ to die and rise again for you and for me, opening the gates of heaven for everyone who puts their full trust and faith in Him. We cannot lean on anything we have done, but thank God we can lean on Christ! He is our sure hope. He is God's gift to everyone and for everyone. And ultimately that is the real motivation for using our gifts for God's glory - that in Christ God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves, no matter how gifted or talented we are. "There are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit." Yes, indeed there are varieties of gifts. But the greatest gift of all, the One we all need, is God's greatest gift of love - Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."