

“Spiritual Gifts”
September 26, 2010
Grove Presbyterian Church

New Testament Lesson and Reflection

I Corinthians 12: 1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

Quite right. It is vital for us to be informed Christians. Those uninformed are like the deer who forgets when hunting season begins.

Yes, it is helpful to know yourself, aware of what nature and nurture has given you – your native talents, your gifts, your personality, your desires. But knowing Godly things, realized by paying attention to Christ, that is when you begin to know how to use your self-knowledge. For we live by the spiritual gifts as much as by the material gifts.

I'm rather fond of the material. I'm a material kind of guy – flesh, skin, a good steak, books, a nice pipe puffing smoke rings-- and it is good. But I also want the spiritual qualities to fill me – wisdom, faith, truth, patience, goodness, kindness, love, peace, justice, trust, letting go of control. I rely on them as much as my stomach and taste buds rely on a sirloin steak. Maybe more so, because those spiritual qualities – wisdom, faith, truth, patience, goodness, kindness, love, peace, justice, trust, letting go of control -- aren't natural to me; we are no more the source of things spiritual and divine than a tree is the source of language.

If we produce any godly fruit it is because we are connected to the nourishing vine. The branch -- us twigs – wrongfully takes credit for the grapes. Apart from Christ we can do nothing.

On our own, we tend to take these gifts and – quite naturally -- pervert them by the twisting grasp of the self. We can take something as divine as love and make it harmful, hurtful, sick. Our capacity to self-justify knows no bounds. Ask the pederast.

For these difficult and demanding days, I want daily what the divine reality supplies to equip my self for making the best of these tough times.

The material cannot feed the spiritual but the spiritual must feed the material. I want the spiritual reality to guide me through this reality.

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Our Bible portrays the Spirit as breath. *Pneuma* is the word for Spirit. Breath, air – pneumatic drills. The power of breath and air. Unable to see it, but we sure can feel its effect. Like love, we cannot see it but we can experience it.

I once felt this gift of life in a special way -- how breath animates us, this breath of God that invigorates. I think of it as the fibre of life. We were putting down my dog. My hand pressed on his chest, my palm feeling his heartache. The vet gave the injection and my dog stopped. No more heartbeat. That final exhalation. No more breath. In that instant, he turned into silly putty in my hands. My muscular dog disappeared. The animating force, the fibre of life produced by the presence of that breath vanished in a second. Without breath we are gone. Without the spirit, we are nothing. We can do nothing.

**You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. 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.**

**Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;**

Varieties – various allotments, apportionments of these gifts. Well, the word really means graces apportioned as a divine favor bestowed upon you.

**and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;**

**and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.**

Spirit, Lord, God – Paul makes clear here how the Trinity is at work in us, equipping us with distinctive skills, aptitudes, personalities. God refuses to use empty vessels. Our Lord welcomes us as partners. Which is why I chose today’s Exodus passage. We believe God has limited God’s self to depend on us. God relies on us to express and fulfill God’s will. It’s the only way it’ll happen. The divine through you. Instead of picking up that bunch of Hebrews and transplanting them, God worked through the personality of Moses.

**To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**

Nothing hidden or mysterious. Manifested. Disclosure. Making it apparent. Making it obvious and plain, available and accessible for everyone. No secret handshakes or passwords or knowledge of God reserved for those with special powers.

Who among you shows these graces?

**To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,**

Sophia is wisdom. It is feminine.

Knowledge is a matter of knowing things, knowing information. Wisdom is knowing what is right and doing it.

**to another faith by the same Spirit,**

Faith, faithing, active trusting, knowing which way to lean. You know those who just have it. Who you can count on to put life in perspective for you.

**to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,**

The emphasis here is on the clause: “by the one spirit.” Healing occurs by the spirit. We can establish the conditions – whether for physical, emotional, social, mental health – but it is the spirit that heals. Woe to the Surgeon or Physician or Psychologist who are convinced they heal.

**to another the working of miracles,**

Those who, as this phrase literally suggests, daily demonstrate the power and might of God.

**to another prophecy,**

Too often we mistake prophets for fortune tellers. Think again. Prophets are those who have the guts to tell the truth, whose profound insight into the will of God prompts them to annoy the world by comparing what God desires with the way we mess it up. The truth will set you free, but first it’ll really, really hurt.

**to another the discernment of spirits,**

Intuition? Some just have that uncanny radar about people. They can tell what is that spirit moving and motivating a person, which isn’t always divine – turn on TV and watch Bride-zillas for a glimpse of ugly spirits at work.

**to another various kinds of tongues,**

These gifts of ecstatic utterances, not unique to Christianity Transcendent moments, like being swirled up by music or passion.

**to another the interpretation of tongues.**

For as Paul later writes, it is one thing to have such a personal, intimate, even ecstatic experience, it is altogether more helpful when others can translate the message, the moment – let all things build up the body, Paul commends.

**All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.**

Who around you shows these graces at work?

If it is from God, you can tell by what it does. Effect reveals the cause.

Is it divine? Paul in this passage supplies us with three demonstrations of authenticity.

First, rather than accomplishing the good for a select few, the common good is the aim, bringing us together in unity amidst our variety. If it divides or tears down or dehumanizes, it is anti Holy Spirit.

Second, rather than exercising esoteric power over others -- secret knowledge where emotionalism kicks out reason -- if it is spiritual, it makes things intelligible rather than secret: transparency, plain sense, and sensible, beyond a rampant emotionalism.

Third, rather than us using things spiritual to manipulate God to do our bidding in the world, God spiritually works with us to unfold what is good to God; as a bud and blossom expresses the essence of the flower plant, so do we express the essence of God in our existence.

Everybody has something special to offer. Everybody is important. Important is to realize what you are good at rather than worry about what you are not good at. Embrace and trust your differences for the sake of others. The gestalt of the whole relies on you being the best you are. Do right today and let God work the result.

Just as Nature and Nurture has supplied us with our unique traits and gifts – whether art or music or physics or sports or cooking -- so God graces you with qualities and favors with which to harness and employ who you are naturally.

The Myers Briggs Personality Inventory, for example, helps us realize are we extroverts or introverts, are we sensors or intuiters, do we make decisions by subjective or objective criteria, are we systematic or spontaneous?

The Learning Style Inventory helps us discover the ways in which we individually learn best. For some it's verbal/linguistic (I scored 10 out of 10 here) for others math/logical (scored 1 out of 10). But there also are six other ways to learn, which if you discover might help some of our young people discover they might be smarter than others presume.

Then come the spiritual gifts and capacities **to focus** our natural gifts.

A shame to let these gifts calcify.

A shame for us to hinder others from using them (a healthy management policy is: get out of way of good people).

A shame for some to deny their spiritual selves.

A shame when some over time discard who they are and sell out.

Which is why we are individually best when we together are better. Success often is a matter of effective combinations. The glory of right combinations:

Rosemary with a roast pork loin

Peanut butter and jelly

Baritones and sopranos

Abbott and Costello

Stilton Cheese and Port

Jeffrey and Amanda

You and Grove Church around you