

Sunday January 16, 2022 Epiphany 2          Sharing Our Gifts

I Corinthians 12:1-11    John 2:1-11

*‘Tis the gift to be simple, ‘tis the gift to be free, ‘tis the gift to come down where you ought to be, and when we find ourselves in the place just right, ‘twill be in the valley of love and delight.* “ These are the words of an old Quaker hymn written about the gifts God gives each person and how we put into practise these spiritual gifts.

What is your gift matrix offered and given to you by God? In order to answer this question, you do not need to watch Canadian actor Keanu Reeves in the movie, ‘The Matrix’ but the question is reflected in that movie because his character’s abilities and opportunities are presented and tested. Our matrix involves discerning which spiritual gifts are given to you by God and whether you faithfully steward these gifts for the common good. There is some controversy amongst Christian leaders as to when one receives these spiritual gifts. But when we think of this matrix in which we each live and have our being, we might ask if it is as we mature during the gestational period in our mothers, that much of who we are as individuals is developed. Just think for a moment—if you have siblings- they are not the same as you at all. Even multi-birth babies are distinguished by characteristics as they grow up but when we think of the matrix we call all that which makes us unique, just what are these gifts, that is natural gifts or if you like, characteristics you have received from your parents?

Some of these are how we would describe ourselves- tall, short, brown/blue/green eyes, brown, black, red hair (before it all goes gray), or even inabilities—the need for glasses at an early age or the design of your hands and feet in comparison to your parents. All these are part of who you are- physically. But there is more to each person than their physical presence! And we know our bodies change as we grow older, and so does our ability to put into practise our spiritual gifts!

In our reading from I Corinthians, Paul is writing to the people of the church at Corinth about spiritual gifts all of which come from God. Each of the varieties of gifts, services and activities are offered and activated by God, but we each need to figure out what God calls us to do in every season of our lives.

What is a spiritual gift? It is an ability that comes to you freely (like a present) for the purpose of ministering to needs of others so as to build up the Christian community in size and depth. These abilities or gifts come to us by the Spirit but often we do not know what they are because our paths of every day living from childhood, to school and education into adulthood

and work keep us from discerning the full extent of our gifts, aptitudes, talents and abilities. Yet in the context of people's lives, each person- child to adult- has spiritual gifts! Paul states that there are a variety of spiritual gifts all coming from God, whose Spirit works in all of them to all people.

So what are spiritual gifts? There are three main kinds- prophetic, priestly and kingly. Each of us as we grow in faith and understanding of the Bible and how to live in its teachings are gifted to share in spiritual gifts. If we understand and articulate the truth of who Jesus is for us we are able to share this message with others. Depending upon our level of knowledge we are able to be prophets to children and adults alike. To care and show care for others is a priestly or a pastoral role to share with people. And if we are wise and experienced as well as practical and can envision what a group needs this is role of kingly gifts.

But each individual is not able to all things. Neither are ministers able to do it all! This is why we have a church—and God blesses the church to have people able to share their gifts as they learn what they are for the common good. For example, some people are amazing to share in pastoral care—meeting and greeting and talking with people who are in need, or lonely or just need a little help. Others do not find their gifts in this area of ministry, but in having a vision of different ways of sharing Christ's message in evangelistic or outreach. Still others, can teach the message of love at various levels and enjoy doing this as they see children and adults alike experience what it means to be happy in Jesus. These forms of ministry call us to a variety of tasks in our lives and this is why the church is so amazing! Because we are always discerning what we are called to do! Even Jesus did this!

Last week we recalled the story of Jesus' baptism when a voice from heaven called Jesus His beloved Son. A few days later Jesus spoke with Simon Peter, Andrew and then Philip and Nathanael and asked them to follow him. They did. A few days later there was a wedding in Cana and Jesus and his disciples attended. It was early in the celebrations when Mary, Jesus' mother raised a major concern with him. They had run out of wine! Mary knew that Jesus could do something about this problem. After all, if there was no wine, the party would end and everyone would leave. The wedding couple and their families would be embarrassed in Cana forever!

Jesus knew what he could do but he didn't want to draw attention to himself. He had already been introduced at his baptism time. John had called him the Lamb of God before he

called disciples and now here was his mother wanting him to perform a miracle to show to others that he could make wine on demand. Jesus told her, My hour has not yet come.”

From these words, he knew that there would be an appropriate time to come that everyone would witness and see him as God’s Son, but as he was having a good time at the wedding with his friends, he did not want to do anything to create a spectacle. Only a few people knew the problem- Mary the wine steward, servants and the master of the banquet. Jesus told the servants to fill up water jugs. They did because Mary had told them to do what ever Jesus asked. They were then to take the drink over to the chief steward. The steward tasted it and spoke with the bridegroom about the great tasting wine. Jesus had turned the water into wine discreetly and quietly. He truly was / is the Son of God for he had performed a miracle without creating a scene, a spectacle within the celebration and had just sat quietly. He merely resolved a problem by serving others to the best of his ability.

These last 20 months have been difficult for people. Yet one thing that recurs is the depth of service that people are sharing and showing to others and for others. As we consider our church and how we are committed to serving we need to remember that every Christian is in ministry through the church—no matter their age and with all different abilities, and no one is merely a consumer of services; everyone is a distributor of our collective gifts. We need to ask God to help us to figure out how best to discern the gifts for the good of all people. And we need people to stand up and agree to serve Christ once again.

We are all called to serve Christ in His church as faithful followers of Jesus. The disciples did not hesitate when Jesus said, “Follow me.” He didn’t ask with a question mark. He said, “Follow me. “ They did. We have stated our intention to serve Christ, now is the time. Serving is putting the needs of others ahead of our own or putting the needs of the community ahead of our individual needs. There are benefits to do this.. 1) self knowledge. You will grow in your knowledge about your real gifts and capacities in the church. You will come to understand you abilities as you relate to others and get to know others in a relationship focused on Jesus

2) community—if you serve with the idea of serving others and not as a consumer, you will grow in relationship with Christian friends and have Jesus’ message of love in your heart. Not what you can get from serving, but what you can give to others

3) fulfilment and joy of seeing others touched through you. When you plant seeds of faith in others in however you serve your church, eventually you will see what you did sprout up in another person your heart will grow with passion and your love of Jesus will overwhelm you.

When this occurs you will want to do more because your focus is not inward but in the eyes of others.

Jesus gave his life for you. What can you do in response to his gift of hope and resurrection? What calls you to serve Christ here and now? Maybe there is a different idea of where you would like to serve? A change in perspective of how the church works together, or maybe the Spirit is speaking to you and calling you to learn who Jesus is as we seek to grow in faith together.

What are your spiritual gifts—what is in your matrix—that is all the things you can and are able to do? If you are unsure, take your questions to God and then speak to others in the church. There is a place for you. For when we gather as the body of Christ, you have an important role to play. Rejoice and give thanks for your spiritual gifts known and still being discovered.

Let us pray:

God of gifts and hope, we praise you that you activate us into using the gifts your Spirit has bestowed upon us. Enable us to discern what these gifts may be. Enable us to speak to act and to serve you in faith. Hear us as we pray in this time of silence. AMEN.