

“Holy Spirit Activate”

There is nothing like getting a gift. Christmas is a time filled with gift giving and receiving gifts. Gifts can range from very useful to very silly. This year I saw loads of unique gift giving trends. In one I saw a cousin who buried their cousin’s gift in concrete. Of course, the concrete gift was nicely wrapped.

In another I saw a mother who gave her teenage and adult son a gift wrapped in gift after gift after gift. What she wrapped each gift in was the most interesting part. The first gift was wrapped in normal wrapping paper, but each gift afterwards was wrapped in very non-traditional ways from layers of duct tape to layers of zip ties to an entire roll of plastic wrap.

I also saw a husband who neatly wrapped his own truck keys as a gift for his wife.

However, the truck was not the gift it just contained the gift, a brand-new Apple computer in the backseat.

I think my favorite gift wrap trend was the mother who wrapped each and every empty box her kids left around the house – in the refrigerator, in the freezer, in the cabinets, laying around. That was a trend I could partake in!

At our house this Christmas was very low key. While I wasn’t as extreme as the videos, I did reuse cereal boxes for candy and money and Gabe’s jar of pickle slices fit very nicely in the empty peach Red Bull box.

Our scripture from 1 Corinthians 12 is about gifts but not ones that can be uniquely and extremely wrapped and placed under a tree. No, the gifts in our scripture today are from the Holy Spirit. There are many parts of the scripture that speak to spiritual gifts. In Romans 12:6-8 Paul writes “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.” In Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul writes “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.”

The important part of 1 Corinthians 12 is not the actual spiritual gifts. The most important is how it starts and ends. First let us look at verse 1. Paul starts with “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.” Hum, uninformed. This is an odd word isn’t? Well actually if we study what was happening in Corinth at this time it is a really accurate word. In Corinth there were problems galore: divisions, high-mindedness, unlove, selfishness – to name a few. The Corinthians had unfortunately become very prideful about their own particular spiritual gifts and dismissive of the spiritual gifts given to others. The spiritual ones, the people, were beginning to use their spiritual gifts to cause division between them. Ultimately in this verse Paul is speaking directly to the spiritual people. Those people in the Corinthian church who asserted their own selves as gifts to the church.

In verses 2 and 3 Paul goes on to write “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.” What Paul is saying here is that individuals who bless Jesus make another kind of humanity – a people defined by their creation in Christ. The redeemed are no longer Corinthians, Romans, Europeans, Asians or Americans first. The redeemed are first of all Christians and this has massive implication on understanding our unity in Christ and the true gifts of the Holy Spirit.

What we must not do is use the Holy Spirit to do things that are not intended and we must avoid quenching the Holy Spirit. We should instead pray for help and seek to apply all that He says. No more, no less. For some of us this may mean being open to what the Spirit is doing and how He manifests himself in the world and to others of us it may mean being open to correction – it may be that what we have seen or done or defended is beyond the

scope of what we were meant for. The gift of the Holy Spirit is greater. Exercising our gifts not only glorifies God and amplifies our enjoyment of God but it also tempts us to trade Him for those gifts. In this scripture Paul is re-centering the Corinthians and us on the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In verses 4 – 7 Paul writes “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of servers, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Common good...this mean quite simply that the spiritual gifts are NOT for you...they are given TO you for the good of the church. Every church including Overbrook UMC is filled with gifted people, given by God for the purpose of mutual upbuilding. The church even this one is the stockpile of spiritual gifts in service of God.

People who serve in their area of giftedness tend to be energetic and enthusiastic, right? They do not get tired or demoralized easily. On the other hand, some who serve are very active and busy in a church but feel fruitless and ineffective when they are serving in the wrong area or wrong place. All spiritual gifts are needed and contribute to the health, vitality, and strength of the church. The quality of ministry goes up when each of us are doing what we do best. The biblical model of the church is for the people, the members of the body, to care for one another.

In the next three verses of our scripture Paul writes “To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.” Finally in verse 11 he sums it up “All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”

Exercising our spiritual gifts is done with a servant's heart and mind because of gratitude in our heart for what Jesus has done for us. Servants of Jesus do not feel they are "doing their time" or "paying their dues". No, we use our spiritual gifts because we want to, we feel fulfilled, we help build the Body of Christ and we make a difference in the lives of other people. What I am trying to say here is that you should never feel like there isn't anything you can do for the common good or to build the Body of Christ. There are two things that we can do no matter our age or physical abilities – we can pray for people, and we can encourage them!

Together we can be a body of believers who want our lives to count for Christ. We want to impact the world God loves and for which Jesus died and rose again. A lot of people in this world have no idea who Jesus is and it is our privilege to tell them.

There is an ancient Hindu proverb that says at one time all people thought they were divine. So, Brahma decided to hide the gift of divinity. But where would he hide it? One said, "Hide it on the highest mountain." But Brahma said, "No, some day people will climb the highest mountain." Some said, "Hide it in the depths of the sea." But Brahma said, "No, some day people will plumb the depths of the sea." "Anyone else have a suggestion?" he asked. All were silent. Then Brahma had an idea: "We will hide it within each human. They will never think to look there."

Scripture tells us that we are created a little less than God (Psalm 8). Jesus also tells us in scripture that the kingdom of heaven is within us and that there is a valuable treasure waiting within us to be discovered and shared. We just need to unwrap it and put it to use. (Luke 17:21) Further in 1 Corinthians Paul writes "Since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church."

Many of you know that music is a gift for me and as I was preparing my message this morning many songs came to me. One of my favorite childhood memories here at

Overbrook UMC was opening time where we sang songs. I fondly remember Evelyn Martin playing for us in the basement of the old church and Lois Moore playing for my sons when they were young. Both were musically gifted. I love all the songs I learned but one of my most favorite ones kept coming to me and I'm sure all of you know it too.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

There are many more verses to this song but the ones we would sing were

Hide it under a bushel no! I'm gonna let it shine

Don't let Satan blow it out! I'm gonna let it shine

Shine all over Overbrook, I'm gonna let it shine

I think the reason it kept popping into my head is for me to encourage you to let your little light shine. Don't hide it. Don't let Satan blow it out! Shine your light all over Overbrook and everywhere you go this week. Our goal as a church is to have fully devoted followers of Jesus making their unique contributions. My prayer for you is to embrace you gifts and let your light shine! Amen.