

SPIRITUAL GIFTS - BODY PARTS
A SERMON BASED ON 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-31
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2017
10:00 a.m.

A while back, a friend of mine in ministry sent me an e-mail.

It was a want ad for a minister.

It read;Wanted: A minister for a growing church

-- a real challenge for the right person.

Applicant must offer experience in;

facility maintenance,

office management,

as an educator at all levels, up to and including graduate level.

It would also be helpful to have experience as an

artist, salesman, fundraiser, diplomat, writer, theologian,

politician, Boy Scout leader, children's worker,

marketing consultant, publicist, web design,

amateur athlete, psychologist, vocational counsellor,

funeral director, wedding consultant, master of ceremonies,

missionary, and social worker.

Also helpful but not essential:

kitchen, landscape, and interior design experience.

Must know all about the problems of birth, marriage, and death;
must also be conversant with latest theories and practices
in areas like pediatrics, economics, and medicine.

Will demonstrate a musical preference for:

classical, gospel, soft rock, jazz, opera, and heavy metal.

Favourite musical instrument will be;

the organ, the piano, the guitar, the drums, the flute,
the violin and on occasion, the tambourine.

The candidate must be able to sing, in tune.

The right person will hold firm views on every topic,

but will be careful not to upset people who disagree.

Must be forthright but flexible.

Returns criticism and backbiting,

with Christian love and forgiveness.

Should have outgoing, friendly disposition at all times.

Should be a captivating speaker and intent listener.

Should enjoy the company of infants, toddlers, small children,
teens, 20 somethings, young parents, retirees and
and mature seniors.

Sensitive to the needs and issues of women.

Able to connect with the concerns of men.

Is a dog person. And is a cat person.

The successful applicant will be directly responsible

for the views and conduct

of all his or her church members and visitors,

He or she will be subject to receiving direction from any person.

No overtime pay.

No weekends or statutory holidays off.

No opportunity for advancement.

Anyone applying will also be expected to undergo

a psychological assessment to determine sanity.

Every job has its demands.

Hey! I got the job!

I've seen something like what I just read for you

for a variety of roles out there.

The one for a stay at home parent is longer than

the one I just read.

But one feature of being in ministry -

is this expectation that the minister,

should somehow be all things to all people,

or somehow knows things about everything.

That somehow, the minister is the entire church.

We have started to learn about spiritual gifts in the past two weeks.

We've learned that as a Christian,

with receiving Christ into your life,

the Holy Spirit of God indwells you.

And that, indwelling you,

the Holy Spirit will manifest in your life

in what we've taken to calling

a spiritual gift.

It is a gift that will allow God to further his kingdom

and further his mission in the world, though you.

If you have received Christ,

the Holy Spirit can manifest in your life in some way.

When Paul wrote to the church in the Greek city of Corinth,

he was writing to a church that was having a great deal of trouble getting along.

When communion was celebrated in the early church,
it would feel more like our pot-luck suppers,
than the way we celebrate the Lord's Table in worship.

In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth,

had to include instructions regarding table manners.

Imagine a pot-luck where people rushed the table,

and took so much food,

that there wasn't enough left for everyone.

I mean we've all been to one or two of those.

But this was a group where it happened consistently,
again and again.

Paul had to tell this congregation,

“When you come together, it’s not the Lords’s Supper you eat,
for as you eat, each of you goes ahead
without waiting for anybody else,
one remains hungry, another gets drunk.

Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in?

Or do you despise the church of God

and humiliate those who have nothing?

Shall I praise you for this?

No way.”

This church sounds like the 12 year old boys cabin at summer camp,
clamouring to get to the food first.

You can be pretty sure the Corinthian church,

unable to wait their turn at the table,

had other problems when it came to getting along.

Reading chapter 12,

then recalling the beginning of the letter,

it is pretty clear there were also some rivalries going on.

In chapter one Paul says he has heard from Chloe about rivalries.

Some of you say I belong to Paul.

Some say I belong to Apollos.

Some say I belong to Peter.

Some say I belong to Christ.

There is jealousy and quarrelling among you.

Paul had to remind them,

I may have planted the seed of the gospel,

but Apollos watered,

and you know what - God made it grow.

Only God deserves any credit,

only God can make something grow.

We are all God's fellow workers.

You are God's field.

You are God's building.

So, no more boasting.

In chapter twelve Paul reinforces this idea.

He points out that the ability to confess Jesus as Lord,

comes from the Holy Spirit.

No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

Faith in Christ,

puts the quarrelling, divisive, me first, entitlement-minded,

that work is beneath me attitude

Corinthians on the same team.

If you can declare faith in Christ,

you have the same Holy Spirit,

you have the same captain.

Paul reinforces this point,

with an allusion to the Trinity.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

There are different kinds of service, but the same Jesus

There are different kinds of working, but God is the power.

The gifts and energy to serve,

comes from the Triune God.

Within his Trinity, God undertakes differing roles,

to accomplish his work.

With this as his precedent,

Paul points out to these Corinthians,
these people clamouring to be first at the table,
who want to be recognized as the most important,
the most connected,
the most valuable,
the most necessary,
Paul points out to them,
that the Holy Spirit,
will appear in every Christian's life
in different ways...

And here is the key,

for the common good.

The Holy Spirit will manifest in everyone in the church

in some way, with some gift,

that will be for the common good, for the common mission

not for personal glory, or personal fulfilment,

for the common good of God's mission.

He puts some examples in front of the Corinthians.

Some will have wisdom.

Some knowledge, some will have faith,
some will have gifts of healing,
some the gift of miracles,
some, the gift of prophecy,
some, the ability to discern people and spirits,
some the ability to speak in tongues or interpret them.

In other letters Paul speaks of gifts such as encouragement,
evangelism, the gift of being able to give, to teach
to help, the gift of leading, or administering, or showing mercy.

Paul says, all of these things, and others,
are gifts from the same Holy Spirit.

Then, because he knows the Corinthians,
because he knows they will likely rank the gifts
as soon as they hear them,
because they will likely jostle for a position of prominence
with the gifts,
just like they jostled for a position of prominence

at the table,

because the Corinthians were entirely likely to come up with statements like;

“My gift of knowledge is more important than your gift of administration.”

or “My gift of healing shows without question that I have the Holy Spirit.”

or “If you can’t speak in tongues,

are you sure you even have the Holy Spirit?”

“Anyone can teach, that might not be the Spirit.”

Because the Corinthians were like this,

and let’s face it,

we can be too,

Because we are prone to look at someone else’s ability

and wish we had it.

Or think less of ourselves because of what we lack,

instead of what we bring...

Because Paul knew the Corinthians were like this,

because we are like this,

Paul reminded them,

the church is the body of Christ.

Many parts, one body.

All parts are necessary and add to the body.

He spells it out.

If your whole body were an ear, how would you see?

If your whole body were a foot, how would you hear?

If your whole body were an eye, how would you get anywhere?

And just like the body has its varied components,

for various purposes,

each gift the Holy Spirit gives the Christian,

each manifestation of the Spirit

is for the common good of the church

in its work for God's mission.

All necessary, all important.

For the body to work at its optimum,

for the body to do its best work,

there can be no division,

all parts having equal concern for the whole.

Paul says it directly to the Corinthians,
and they are words that I hope sprung off the page at you.
You are the body of Christ,
each one of you is a part of it.

On Saturday October 14th,
Chris Vizzari will be leading a morning workshop.
The workshop, along with some tests Chris will make available.
will give you the opportunity to consider and name
the spiritual gift God has given you.
It is a chance to learn how you might best function
in God's mission through the church,
for the common good.

I want you to be able to consider and reflect on how the Spirit
has manifested and is manifesting in you with a spiritual gift,

A Gallup survey discovered that only 10 percent of American church
members are active in any kind of personal ministry.

Our number at Chippawa Presbyterian is definitely higher.

However,

the Gallup folk also discovered that 50 percent of all church members have no interest in serving in any ministry, so half of the church's members will remain spectators.

I can tell you of three things that happen when gifts aren't used.

First, the body becomes handicapped.

unable to serve God in some way

because there are parts that aren't working.

If all those who have professed their faith in Christ, and have become members of this congregation, were using their gift,

where do you think we would be?

It both thrills me and scares me to think of it.

The other thing that happens when gifts aren't being used,

is that for the body to function,

other people end up working outside their area of giftedness,

doing things they aren't really good at,
to keep things going.

And the church doesn't do the best it is capable of,
and those doing the work they aren't gifted for
get burnt out and discouraged and then discourage others.

Finally,

for those who don't use their gifts,
they miss the wonder and the joy of seeing God at work in them,
and through them.

If you want to see God work,
and have evidence of him moving in lives,
you have to serve, you have to move the body part.
If you aren't serving, if you aren't moving,
your ability to see God will be limited.

These are the reasons I want you to use your gift,
to get serving,
to find out what it is you really care about,
what God has laid on your heart,

and to let the Spirit move in you and through you.

It may result in something brand new in our midst.

God has given you a gift,

for our common good and to further God's mission.

There is a Peanuts cartoon where Charlie Brown is talking to Linus

and says: "I'd like to be able to feel that I am needed."

Linus replies: "Don't forget, Charlie Brown,

that people who are really needed

are asked to do a lot of different things."

Charlie Brown ponders this for a moment and then declares:

"Well I'd like to feel needed and yet not have to do anything."

Paul said to the church,

each one of you is part of the body of Christ.

Each one of you,

with your gift, is needed,

is a part for the common good of fulfilling God's mission.

The parts of the body are all different,
appointed by God, a gift, a manifestation of the Holy Spirit.
Each part different.
Each one important.
Each one necessary.

The story is told of a group of people gathered in a shop
quite a number of years ago
for the sale of some antiques.
The auctioneer brought out an old, dusty violin.
He told the audience that it was a rare Stradivarius
and that it was worth a great deal of money.
No one however, was impressed;
only one bid for five pounds was offered.

Meanwhile a man had entered the shop from the street.
He was very tall and thin, and wore a velvet coat.
He walked to the front of the shop,
picked up the violin, and dusted it.
He then held it to his ear and reached for the bow.

As he did so, a murmur went round the room,
'Paganini' - he was a Master violinist.

For the next few minutes,

the great musician held everyone spellbound
with the most exquisite virtuoso performance.

Then he stopped.

As he did so, the people started clamouring for the violin:
fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety pounds.

Eventually the violin was sold to Paganini himself
for one hundred pounds,

and that evening at the concert hall,
he held a vast audience of thousands in rapt attention,
and moved their hearts,
as he played the dusty Stradivarius violin again.

You are God's Stradivarius,

shaped with a gift from the Holy Spirit,
to perform,

not to gather dust.

No one person can do everything.

But every person can do at least one thing.

Every Christian carries a gift of the Holy Spirit,
to be used for the common good of the church,
so that God may accomplish his purposes,
in you and through you.

Brush off the dust.

Do the work and ministry your part of the body does.

Be moved as the Spirit moves through you,

Amen.

(Today' video shows that it isn't as easy as you think to make a body
move.)