

SPIRITUAL GIFTS - THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT  
A SERMON BASED ON ACTS 8:9-24  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO  
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2017  
10:30 a.m.

Gift giving can be a bit of a minefield.

It shouldn't be.

A gift is something that should express our esteem, respect,

appreciation, gratitude, love, best wishes, affection, care, for another.

It should be a show of the heart,

a chance reveal our true feelings.

At least it could be.

But often, too often, it's a minefield.

Because we know that a gift will reflect us,

gift giving can undergo more image management

than a facebook page.

What will she think of me, if I get her this?

Will she think I overspent?

Will she think I underspent?

Will she think I have poor taste?

Will he be mad that I didn't get the right colour,

or that I didn't get the right brand

that one he says is the only one he'll even use?

What did they get us at our wedding?

We need to do the same!

What do you think the price per plate is?

We need to cover that.

Gift giving.

What will they think, of me, of us, when I give this gift?

Because it is a show of the heart, it becomes complicated.

We want to be well thought of.

We want be thought of as generous, thoughtful, creative, and kind.

That's the more noble complication.

But there is also the more transactional model of gift giving.

It is also a show of the heart.

If I want to get something good, I better give something good.

If I want my back scratched,

I better scratch theirs.

And so it becomes more about favours and debts,

rather than gifts.

Accounting skills become necessary

in the transactional model of giving.

I got you this.

You should get me something in kind.

I got you a deal here.

You give me a deal there.

This morning we start a teaching series on 'Spiritual Gifts'.

If you've lived in church land long enough,

you will have learned a little of the dialogue about spiritual gifts.

The basic premise is this.

As a Christian, as a person who has invited Christ into your heart,

who has entered into relationship with Jesus,

you are given the Holy Spirit,

and you are given what are called, spiritual gifts.

There are a couple places in the New Testament that list some.

The most well know include

Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.

And admittedly, for all intents and purposes,

these passages can sound a little bit like

a list of aptitudes, or a skills inventory

like something you might do at a employment training seminar.

The list, certainly not a complete one, includes things like;

leadership, serving, administration, wisdom, faith, giving

discernment, evangelism, helps, knowledge, pastor, teacher.

But what's different from an employment skills inventory,

is the premise that these are not just natural talents or abilities,

set in your DNA, or your personality type

or merely developed through training and lessons and practice,

but there are gifts that come

with the presence and working of the Holy Spirit in your life.

The Holy Spirit gives these gifts

to equip, empower and encourage the church,

to be the witnesses Jesus mandated us to be.

It was in the upper room, in Acts chapter 1 that Jesus said,

‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;  
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,  
and in all Judea and Samaria,  
and to the ends of the earth.’

So rather than an employment skills inventory,  
these are gifts given by the Holy Spirit  
to fulfill this mandate to be a witness, to give witness.

But gift giving can be a minefield.

And here in chapter 8, Simon steps on a mine.

The Holy Spirit came up those in the Upper Room way back in chapter 2.

Tongues of fire rested on them,

they all began to speak in many different languages.

People from all around the world,

were hearing the good news about Jesus

in their own language.

They were both amazed and perplexed.

Some thought the group had been drinking.

Church land has a little phrase called being drunk in the Spirit.

Not spirits. Spirit.

The saying comes from this occasion.

But despite the call to be witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria,

and the ends of the earth,

at the beginning of chapter 8, the church still hadn't left Jerusalem.

They had had some committee meetings.

They replaced the apostle Judas by straw vote.

They set up a board of seven deacons to manage widow care.

Two of the seven were Stephen and Philip.

But all of it was happening in Jerusalem.

The church hadn't moved outward yet.

It was Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in chapter 7

that got things moving.

He called out this 'supreme court' of the Jewish people,

finishing his speech with

'You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!

You are just like your fathers.

You always resist the Holy Spirit!

Was there ever a prophet your fathers didn't persecute.

They even killed those who predicted the coming  
of the Righteous One.

And now you too.'

The Sanhedrin executed Stephen.

His execution meant it was open season on the church,  
and the church scattered.

Philip went to Samaria.

It's important to understand a little bit about Samaria.

Samaria was right in between Judea, where Jerusalem was,  
and Galilee,

where Jesus did the majority of his miracles and teaching.

In Old Testament times it had been the heart-land  
of the northern kingdom.

When the Assyrians carried the leaders of the Northern Kingdom  
into captivity, into exile,  
imported foreigners were sent in to take their place.

These foreigners intermarried with the poorer Israelites  
who were left behind, and a mixed religion resulted.  
You can read more about it in 2 Kings 17.  
But this mixed religion, of people of mixed descent,  
became known as Samaritans.

We had a guest from Northern Ireland staying with us this week.  
Young people in their early 20's.  
Hearing their accounts made me think that there are some parallels  
in relationship between Jews and Samaritans.

In Ireland, you have Irish Unionists,  
generally they are Protestant and part of northern Ireland,  
loyal to the crown and wanting to continue as part of Great Britain.  
You have Irish Nationalists,  
generally they are Catholic and part of southern Ireland.

The distinctions and discriminations run deep,  
right down to the brand of clothing you wear  
being a sign of identity



I don't understand how this would come to be,  
but the O'Neill brand of clothing,  
something worn by California surfers who made it cool,  
but in Ireland, it is worn by Catholics, by nationalists,  
for us, just a name brand,  
but there, identity.

To the point that when one of these young women  
was wearing an O'Neill brand sweater  
her uncle made her take it off in his house.

Unionists and Nationalists, all Irish,  
but don't cross into each other's territory.

Samaritans and Jews,  
the gospel of John 4 explains  
Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.'

That's part of the reason Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman at the well  
is such a scandalous story.

And it was why for those who heard it,  
the story of the good Samaritan was the sound of a dentist's drill.

But Philip went to Samaria.

He proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God,

and the name of Jesus Christ,

and they believed Philip's witness.

They believed him over Simon, their local 'Holy Man'.

Simon practiced sorcery in the city,

he had some pretty good tricks,

good enough that he had taken on airs,

boasted that he was someone great,

High born and low born all gave him their attention.

He had even been given the title,

'The Great Power of God'

I'll tell you a Bible spoiler.

It never goes well for the one that sets him or herself

up against, or above, or in opposition to, God.

So there was Philip, in Samaria,

bringing Samaritans to a faith in Jesus.

They were baptized, men and women.

Samaritans.

We are told that Simon believed and was baptized too.

And really, good on Simon.

We aren't told his motives.

As I was reading this week,

I read from those that argued good motives for Simon.

I read from those that argued selfish motives for him

But Luke has written that Simon believed.

I find it very rarely helpful to try and guess another's motives.

It's too easy to be wrong.

Simon believed, was baptized and then followed Philip everywhere.

He was astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

The man who was known as 'The Great Power of God'

was astonished.

He was seeing the true power of God.

The apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria

had accepted the word of God.

So Peter and John, from the Republic of Ireland,  
crossed over into Northern Ireland.

Peter and John went north to Samaria.

Interestingly, there was no talk

about why Samaritans couldn't accept Jesus.

There was no requirement made that Samaritans would have to stop  
being Samaritans in order to follow Jesus.

There was no convening of the leaders to see if this was  
going to be new policy and direction.

Peter and John prayed for the new believers.

Prayed that they might received the Holy Spirit  
which had yet to come upon them.

Peter and John placed their hands on the Samaritans,  
and they received the Holy Spirit.

Seeing this,

having seen Philip lead signs and miracles,

having seen the gift of the Holy Spirit rest on the Samaritans

Simon wanted in.

Again, who knows his motives.

It could be that he was calculating the value of something like this,

this ability to lay on hands and give the Holy Spirit.

He had been in the 'Great Power of God' business.

Maybe he knew this was the iPhone in a flip phone world

and he wanted shares in the IPO,

in this initial public offering.

Maybe because he knew the value,

he wanted to show respect

for what Peter and John had on offer,

and pay his fair share to get into it,

rather than just get it for nothing.

Whatever he was thinking, he made the offer.

He offered them money and said,

'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands

may receive the Holy Spirit.'

Post resurrection, restored by Jesus Peter

is still the brash uneducated fisherman.

He had an answer for Simon.

The translators had to tone it down so it could be read in church.

Today we read, 'May your money perish with you

because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money.'

What does Peter say in the original?

If you turn off your righteous indignation radar, I'll tell you.

In the Greek, Peter said to Simon,

'To hell with you and your money.'

or alternatively,

'You and your money can go to hell.'

I'm thinking pastoring wasn't Peter's spiritual gift.

Maybe exhortation.

So yeah, 'ouch!'.

Peter keeps going,

'You have no part or share in this ministry,

because your heart is not right before God.

Repent of this wickedness

and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you

for having such a thought in your heart.

For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.'

So, maybe Simon was a greedy charlatan

who wanted the Holy Spirit to make a buck

and was bitter than Philip had ruined his business.

But earlier we read that he believed and was baptized.

Maybe he just made a mistake

and misunderstood how God works,

and how his kingdom works.

I mean really,

gift giving is a bit of a minefield right?

If God gives you a gift,

like his Son,

like salvation,

like his love,

in our gift-giving economy

of you do for me,

and I'll do for you,

you can understand Simon offering

what he saw as having value - money  
in order to have shares in the Holy Spirit.

We do it too.

We speak the same language as Simon.

God does for me. I'll do for God. I did for God. God should do for me.

I gave to the church.

It should buy me a pass on tough times.

I was kind to a difficult person at work,

I should get a promotion in the good people hierarchy,  
a jump ahead on the ladder.

I did some work for a cause,

I spoke against an injustice,

I forwarded or retweeted on social media.

I cleaned out some of my basement and gave it to CP  
or the Salvation Army,

I did all this,

I made a payment!

So bring me my share of the Holy Spirit!



Simon from Samaria doesn't live that far away.

We speak the same language he does.

God, I give you this.

You give me this.

You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.

You do for me. I'll do for you.

Steve Bush has created some videos for us for this series.

I want to show you a video of what our faith begins to look like,

when we live our faith

as if it is grasping, and buying and trading and getting.

(VIDEO)

Your faith, and your work for God, doesn't have to be this way.

Transactional gift giving in the kingdom of God, is a true landmine.

Simon got thrown into the air when he stepped on it.

To hell with you and your money.

Repent of this. Turn this around.

Your heart isn't right before God.

You need God's forgiveness for having this thought

in your heart.

This thought, that your interaction with God is transactional;  
that your relationship with God is deals,  
that your perception that the gift of the Holy Spirit  
is a reward, or earned, or merited, or deserved, or bought,  
with your money, your labour or your time,  
this kind of thinking means you have misunderstood God.  
that your heart isn't right before God.

Simon asked for prayer.

Something was changing for the better in him.

He asked,

'Pray to the Lord for me,

so that nothing you have said may happen to me.'

As we begin to look at spiritual gifts,

the first lesson you must know

is that they aren't tools in a tool box

given to you to go use and earn and win at life's birdfeeder.

Spiritual gifts are a manifestation of God's Spirit in you.

They are a revelation to you of God's Spirit.

They are a demonstration of God's Spirit through you.

Spiritual gifts, are the gift of God's Holy Spirit

indwelling you,

showing up in you

and revealing himself through your life,

that through the power of the Holy Spirit,

you may give witness to Jesus.

Spiritual gifts are the gift of the Holy Spirit himself in you.

The Holy Spirit who is freely given without cost, as grace,

given to you in the love and compassion and joy of God,

because God wants to be in close relationship with you.

You can't put a price on that.

You can't, and you don't buy or trade the gift of God's presence.

You receive the Holy Spirit

You open your heart to the Spirit of God,

and you receive him.

Pure gift.

For the apostles, even for Samaritans, and even for you.

This is the spiritual gift.

The person of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.