

Isaiah 62:1–5
Psalm 36:5–10

1 Corinthians 12:1–11
John 2:1–11

Have you ever worshiped in a Pentecostal church? I have. People's thoughts may go to those who consider themselves Pentecostal. When the pastor began to pray, everybody else in the congregation began to pray their own prayers out loud. It was a cacophony of voices. Pentecostals are also known for speaking in tongues, speaking out loud in words that no one understands. Sometimes these people are referred to as Holy Rollers because they express their religious fervor with a frenzied excitement or trances. "Holy Roller" that term is sometimes used derisively by those outside the Pentecostal church. For us frozen Presbyterians, these kinds of spiritual gifts, this kind of frenzied worship, can make us a bit uncomfortable.

Paul here explains the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and that the gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows upon us are important for God's church. We find here some helpful advice about being of service to God and to humankind. First of all, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us spiritual gifts. In our individualistic society, we tend to think of our gifts—things that we might call skills or strengths--as something we possess. We see them as our talents that we can build on and improve. As one commentator noted, "Spirituality is not an innate human capacity simply waiting to be activated by a little individual effort. Our piety, no matter how impressive, is not a natural endowment, like an aptitude for playing the piano, or the product of resolute willpower." We have done nothing to deserve them. God gives us the gifts because of God's love, grace, and mercy, not because we deserve them. Paul includes faith as one of the gifts. Our faith is a gift from God. Our faith, our piety, our spirituality is not something we accomplish, but it is something that God gives us. Our spirituality, our faith, the practice of our faith is not

due to some works we have performed, but due to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit alone!

Second, all of God's people, all of us, have been given gifts by the Holy Spirit. And don't let anyone tell you differently. Gifts of the Spirit are not given just to people who are more deserving. They are not limited to the holy Joes among us. They are given to all of us. None of us have the right to deny anyone using their gifts for the church and God's people. Does the church have the right to deny the gifts of women in the church? I have heard from women clergy who met with their pastors when they felt they were called by God to be pastors. The pastors told these women, "You must be wrong. God does not call women to be pastors." How can they be so sure! Dare the church tell gays and lesbians that they cannot use their gifts for the church? I know one deaf man who is a very gifted actor. He was asked to do a sign interpretation of the book of Mark for a Christian organization that is translating the Bible in an ASL video format. This organization found out he was gay, and they produced another interpretation of Mark in ASL by a straight person. This gay deaf man had a gift he was using for the church, sharing with the church. Do we deny his gift for the church? We all have gifts to share, and that means you!

Not all gifts are identical. They cannot be. What good is a church if all the people can sing, but no one is gifted to care for the grounds? What good is a church if everyone can sing, but no one can teach? The church needs the variety of gifts.

Spiritual gifts are not limited to the spectacular or the bizarre. Spiritual gifts include not only the charismatic gifts we find in our passage, such as the utterance of wisdom, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, and so on. Spiritual gifts also

include everyday skills, such as teaching, leading, helping others. When we hear the term “spiritual gifts,” our minds may wander to those who are gifted. A gifted student is one who is years ahead of his or her peers in academic achievement. A gifted speaker may be one who is a golden-throated orator. A gifted musician may be someone like Joshua Bell, who was a child prodigy and continues to live up to great expectations and has become an accomplished professional violinist. But when we talk about spiritual gifts we use the word “gifts” only because God has given them to us. God has given each and every one of us spiritual gifts and one is not worth any more or any less, one is not any more important or less important than another. We are a society that prizes some skills more than others or even looks down on those who have skills that have been judged by our society as unimportant. Why should a stock broker make so much more money than a school teacher? Madge Gates Wallace, the mother-in-law to Harry Truman, was a woman who was proud of her place atop the social hierarchy of Independence, Missouri. Yet Mrs. Wallace believed that her son-in-law, the President of the United States, who had been a dirt farmer and failed haberdasher, was unworthy of her daughter Bess. In God’s eyes, there is no gift that is better than another! In God’s eyes, no one gift is more valued than another gift.

David Mosser, a United Methodist pastor, tells about the time he almost burned down the parsonage in his first year of ministry. Eighty-year old Pete Ruth rescued him by repairing the fire damage before the women’s group found out. This group had been concerned that he was too young to be living in their parsonage. Pete told him that he never wanted to pray in public or teach Sunday School. But finally, with the help of this

new pastor, Pete found a way to serve God. Clearly his remodeling job did not bring in the kingdom of heaven, but then none of our gifts do.

The gifts of the Spirit have a definite purpose, the edification of the entire community. Paul here declares that the gifts we have been given are for the common good, not just our own aggrandizement, for our own glorification. These gifts have not been given to individuals for their own spiritual enjoyment. Genuine spirituality is not for the cultivation of emotional highs, mystical thrills, or an exclusively individual serenity. Christianity is not a religion of spiritual Lone Rangers. The gifts that God has given us are intended to be publicly shared and publicly enjoyed.

What Paul is talking about here is stewardship, the stewardship of what God has given us. Paul also wrote about the gifts of the Spirit in his letter to the Romans, “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....” In his letter to the Galatians, he includes generosity in the fruits of the Spirit. When you think about it, generosity is a spiritual gift. It is a gift given by God. The ability to have money, whether we gained it by our own hard work, or by good investing, it is a gift from God. It is God who gave you the ability to earn those dollars and to invest those dollars. Some of us have more ability to give than others. God gave us this gift. And we give for the common good. It is interesting that Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, encourages thieves to “give up stealing; ... let them labor and work honestly with their own hands....” What is interesting is why they are to give up stealing, “so as to have something to share with the needy.” Thieves are not encouraged to give up

stealing to support themselves and their families. But to support the needy. Our generosity, like all of the spiritual gifts, is for the common good!

We offer our spiritual gifts out of a response to God's goodness to us. Each and every one of us has so much to give. Our gifts may not be flashy and glitzy. Good stewards recognize we all have gifts, that we are to share these gifts for the common good, and we use these gifts out of gratitude for God's grace.

And in the temple of the Lord,
the people of God say: Glory! Amen.