

## January 16, 2022

### Sermon Manuscript

#### 1 Corinthians 12:-13:8a

12:<sup>1</sup> Now concerning spiritual gifts<sup>^</sup>, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>2</sup> You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. <sup>3</sup> Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts\*, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

<sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> On

the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts\* of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the higher gifts\*.

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

13:<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends...

<sup>^</sup> Greek *pneumatikon*: things of the Spirit

\* Greek *charisma*: gifts of divine grace

#### Gifts for Love

As believers within the Church, God is most able to use us to build one another up when we are focused on loving one another with the help of His Holy Spirit, and not preoccupied ourselves or our own abilities. This morning our passage(s) from First Corinthians concern what appears in the original Greek as either pneumatikos or charisma, but are often translated in the English as “spiritual gifts”.

And back in 2013, eight years ago, during Lent we offered a five week course on Spiritual Gifts called “Network”. Some of you here may have participated in it, while others may have completed a spiritual gifts course or inventory in another church. There are countless numbers of spiritual gifts courses like these that churches can offer, and all of them are designed around the widespread conception that every Christian, by virtue of having received the Holy Spirit upon believing in Christ and

being baptized, possesses at least one gift, by which they mean an attribute or ability, intended to be used to build up and minister to fellow believers the Church.

Courses like this compile a list of possible abilities from about 4 different New Testament passages, including 1 Corinthians 12. For example, it has been suggested that the following attributes are suggested by 1 Corinthians 12 to be spiritual gifts any of us might have: Administration, Apostle, Faith, Healing, Helps, Word of Knowledge, Miracles, Prophecy, Teaching, Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues, Word of Wisdom. Meanwhile, often added to the list of possibilities from three other passage in the New Testament are the “gifts” of Encouragement, Giving, Leadership, Mercy, Prophecy, Service, Teaching, Evangelism, Celibacy, Hospitality, Martyrdom, Music, Discernment of Spirit, Craftsmanship, and so on.<sup>1</sup> So courses like this run on the premise that what is lacking in the Church is that believers need to discern what gift or gifts *they possess* so they can exercise - to strengthen and use it for God’s glory.

However, the method for discerning this is primarily to have people take a test or inventory of spiritual experiences they have had or ministry they have done, or any abilities that others believers may have recognized or affirmed in them. In other words, it’s an imperfect system/approach, to say the least. It’s sorta like, “Have you ever led a non-believer into a relationship with Jesus?” If so, you probably have the gift of evangelism. “Have you ever spoken in tongues?” Well, then you obviously must have the gift of tongues. “Have you ever given over and above 10% to your church? Well then you have the gift of giving.” “Do you like volunteering behind the scenes? Then you may have the gift of service.” “Do you have experience speaking in front of people and do people say you do a good job? Well, then you may have the gift of preaching or leadership?” I don’t recall what the questions were for determining the supposed gift of martyrdom based on past experience, that seems like sortof a one-time-thing. :) But you get the idea how this works.

And having now 8 years to reflect on this, I wonder what sort of fruit that exercises like that course really bear? I wonder how much positive fruit there was. In other words, how many people who took *that* course, or one similar to it, discerned some gift in themselves that they didn’t previously recognize and began using it for the building up of the church?

Meanwhile, there could have even been some negative fruit. For example, if someone came out of the course puffed up and prideful about a gift they now believed they possessed. While others could have come out feeling more confused about how they can serve God, or still others could have felt boxed in - having their vision overly narrowed as to the ways they might be capable of loving their fellow believers. Now, this isn’t to say the course was bad: we needn’t think about it in black & white terms.<sup>2</sup>

But there are some scholars who have actually **questioned** this widespread conception of Spiritual Gifts that has become so popular over the past century; they’ve questioned whether this idea that every Christian possesses at least one spiritual attribute or ability for their whole lives is even biblical. For example, Kenneth Berding of Biola is one of these scholars,<sup>3</sup> and he suggests that the Greek word *charisma*, typically translated as spiritual gift, refers not so much to an individual ability one possesses, but to **ministries** that the Holy spirit empowers.<sup>4</sup> And this *could* be in a long-term ministry role, like if as a catechist one has the ministry of teaching, or if someone has a ministry of *serving* on the altar guild, if another has a ministry of helping as a driver for St Matti’s has a ministry of helping, if the church treasurer or vestry clerk has a ministry of administration, if a rector has a ministry of leading, and so on. To execute those ministries would obviously draw on one’s individual abilities and character, but ideally they

<sup>1</sup> Also Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:11-13, & 1 Peter 4:10-11

<sup>2</sup> After all, it was a chance for us to be together and get to know each other a little bit more; and I can think of at least one person who came into the parish through that course, after seeing the ad for it on our marquee, and has stuck around.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Berding. “Confusing Word and Concept in ‘Spiritual Gifts’: Have We Forgotten James Barr’s Exhortations?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 1 March 2000. [https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/43/43-1/43-1-pp037-051\\_JETS.pdf](https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/43/43-1/43-1-pp037-051_JETS.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The word *pneumatikos* used in 12:1 just means “Things of the spirit”. So in 12:1 Paul is saying, “Now about the things of the spirit (or spiritual people)”.

would not be relying strictly upon their own resources, but be reliant upon the Holy Spirit for strength and direction. And if so, these would quite literally be *charismas* - gifts of the Lord - ministries *to His church* through believers.

So under Berding's reading of the scriptures a charisma could be a long-term, even formal, ministry role that the Holy Spirit empowers a believer to do. BUT, a charisma could also be a single, spontaneous ministry - a gift of the Holy Spirit through one believer to another that may only happen one time, on one occasion. For example, one believer could speak a word of wisdom - *knowingly or unknowingly* - to another believer, the Lord could speak something through a believer to another person that they *really need to hear* and that could be a one-time spontaneous charism, a ministry from the Lord; or one believer could pray for another believer to be healed and God answers that prayer - and he may or may not every heal someone through that person's prayers again;<sup>5</sup> or God may use Larry to help another person use zoom during the pandemic, so they can access church - but they may not mean that Larry has to serve on the AV team.

As believers within the Church, God is most able to use us to build one another up when we are focused on loving one another with the help of His Holy Spirit, and not preoccupied ourselves or our own abilities.

Well, part of the reason this understanding of charisma, as Holy spirit empowered ministries rather than abilities one possesses - part of the reason this interpretation fits better with a passage like we read today from 1 Corinthians, is that in the Church of Corinth problems had arisen because some people had become preoccupied with the spiritual abilities themselves, and this had borne really bad fruit. You see, the impetus for Paul writing what he does in chapters 12 and 13, is that certain believers in the Corinthian Church had been empowered by God to speak in tongues<sup>6</sup> and thought they were pretty hot stuff, as a result. They looked down upon those who couldn't, figuring they must just not be as 'spiritual' as those who could. And so, these Christian's focus on the gifts themselves - as if they are something *that they possess* - was leading to comparison and division and competition; and it wasn't building up the Church, it was tearing it apart!

And so, in this passage, Paul is trying to lead them away from this mindset of being focused on themselves and on their own abilities and instead toward a mindset of love - of seeking God's help to love one another their primary focus. If you'll look with me, I want to do just a brief overview of what he says...

- In chapter 12, verse 4, he reminds the Corinthians that "There are different kinds of gifts (charisma or charisms), but the same Spirit."
- But he says that whatever the Spirit may empower one to do, the aim must be building one another up. In verse 7 he writes, "7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." not for people's egos to be puffed up
- Down to verse 11, he writes: "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines." In other words, the manifestation of any gift through you is not a mark of your specialness, but of the Holy Spirit, whom all believers have.
- And then, down in verse 15, Paul begins to encourage the believers who have felt excluded or like lesser Christians or looked down upon by other believers. And he does so by using an analogy for the church as the human body. He writes, "<sup>15</sup> Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a

<sup>5</sup> Just because God uses someone in a particular way does not mean that is necessarily an ability - a "spiritual gift" - they possess for all time. When chapter 12, verse 8 says "To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit," and so on, this is describing single instances when a message is given; there is no indication this is some all-time gift. So for the believer who prays for their friend to be healed and it happens, God may choose to do that charism through them again for someone else, but he may not; it may have just been a one-time thing.

<sup>6</sup> Whether this was a miraculous ability to speak in another language that was not their own or in a heavenly language is the subject of some debate, but it is of course a manifestation of the spirit that is noticeable and would get people's attention.

hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.”

- Then, over to the second lesson, verse 21: “The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,”
- Verse 30: “<sup>30</sup> Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues<sup>[a]</sup>? Do all interpret?”
- This faction of more “spiritual” Corinthian Christians had become preoccupied with pursuing what they saw as the greater gifts because they were more dramatic or miraculous. But in 31, Paul says the highest pursuit is not the dramatic or the miraculous, the highest pursuit - and what is hardest and really requires the Holy Spirit’s empowerment more than anything - is love.
- When he says in v 31, “I will show you the most excellent way.” The Greek there for “excellent” is the sense of a ‘higher’ way (like a high mountain pass). And, in chapter 13 he begins to unpack it.
- He continues in 13:1, “If I speak in the tongues<sup>[a]</sup> of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,” - (there’s your martyrdom) - “but do not have love, I gain nothing.

As believers within the Church, God is most able to use us to build one another up when we are focused on loving one another with the help of His Holy Spirit, and not preoccupied ourselves or our own abilities. Now I’m not saying that we can’t be mindful of abilities and experience we may have, as we discern how God may want us to serve him, particularly for any formal position of ministry He might want us to undertake.

But what I *am* saying is that, as we engage with one another in the body of Christ, probably a much more important question than “What are *my gifts*?” is, “What does the love of Christ look like here?” To ask ourselves: “Am I going through my day seeking to be connected to God and yielding to the Holy Spirit that I might be a blessing to others?”

Berding explains that some of the confusion around spiritual gifts -and part of what has led to this whole almost industry and theology of spiritual gifts being abilities we possess - may come from some confusion caused by the **English language**. And this is because in *English* the word “gift” can mean two different things. If you’ll look at the insert in your bulletin, I’ve included a citation from Webster’s Dictionary - probably the first time I’ve done that. But Berding would want us to note that *in English* the word ‘gift’ can first of all refer to a notable capacity or talent that’s either been inherited or endowed - so given by God. And indeed, if you look lower, both the verb and adjective forms of ‘gift’ in English take on this sense. The English verb ‘to gift’ means “to endow with some power, quality, or attribute,” like “she’s been gifted with a beautiful voice. And the English adjective ‘gifted’ typically refers to having some “great natural *ability*”. So with the primary English meaning of “gift” being the sense of a god-given ability, one can understand why our minds would jump to that idea when we read the phrase “spiritual gift” in the

## gift

### noun

- 1: a notable capacity, talent, or endowment
- 2: something voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation



## gift

### verb

- 1: to endow with some power, quality, or attribute  
*She's been gifted with a beautiful voice.*

Definition #2 is the closest to the meaning of the Greek word *charisma*

## gifted

### adjective

- 1: having great natural ability : **TALENTED**  
*gifted children*

Bible, and assume it is something we *possess* (and we better figure out what it is). But the word *charisma* that is translated gift in scripture is likely better understood in the sense of that second English definition of gift, which is “something that is voluntarily transferred from one person to another without compensation,” in other words something that is *free*, that is given by God’s grace alone. A charisma refers to any gift of divine grace, to *any* sort of gift from God. For example, in Romans Paul uses the word charisma to refer to the gift of eternal life as a whole (e.g. Roman 5:15-16<sup>7</sup> & 6:23<sup>8</sup>).<sup>9</sup>

Now, *perhaps* there are some instances where God imparts an ability to someone for all time; perhaps there *are* believers who have a gift of tongues or prophecy or administration for their whole lives, I dunno. Even if that’s the case, if we begin to think of ourselves as possessing a gift - like it’s the same as an ability to hit a baseball or shoot a basketball - then we become much more vulnerable to misusing it or bearing bad fruit, because our reliance upon the Holy Spirit can begin to feel dispensable. And that’s a big problem!

For example, in my case, as someone who has the role of preaching, if I get up here and preach without seeking the help of the Holy Spirit, if I write a sermon without considering what is loving and true, if my goal is to impress people with my ‘giftedness’, well I might just end up doing a whole lot of damage from this here pulpit ( and I’m sure I have done some damage, as a result of self-reliance, on occasion).

But in addition to the motive of ego-inflation infecting the ministry we do, focusing too much on the abilities (or “gifts”) we think we have can also come at the expense of developing areas of weakness or developing capacities to love that don’t come naturally to us. So if a spiritual gifts course tells me I have the gift of “evangelism”, but not the gift of “mercy”, the course is going to encourage me to go ‘exercise’ and ‘develop’ that gift of evangelism, when maybe if I test low on mercy *that’s* what I need to cultivate.<sup>10</sup>

As believers within the Church, God is most able to use us to build one another up when we are focused on loving one another with the help of His Holy Spirit, and not preoccupied ourselves or our own abilities.

But, saying that if we want to be a church that builds one another up we need to be focused on “loving one another”, if that is too general, Paul does indicate what sort of mindset such godly love comes out of. Looking back at chapter 12, at verse 21 again, he writes, “<sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” But look at 22, he says, “<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” Consider for a moment what sorta person you might think of as *weaker* in the Church, and just let this word challenge you: Paul says they are “indispensable”. Why don’t we ask God to show us how that person is indispensable do us, why we need them, how God wants to use their presence in our midst to refine your soul, to teach you how to really love like He does.

Are we engaging our time together like we need one another? Like we need the body? Are we open to God ministering to us through one another? I’m pleased to say that I think there are a lot of folks here who are, a lot of occasions when we do this. And if this *is* how you view the body of Christ - like

<sup>7</sup> “15 But the *free gift* is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the *free gift* by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the *free gift* is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the *free gift* following many trespasses brought justification.” (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> “For the wages of sin is death, but the *free gift* of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (NIV)

<sup>9</sup> Notably, the word charisma in particular is almost never used in Ancient Greek texts outside of the bible and is only used 17x in the New Testament.

<sup>10</sup> This reminds me a little bit of love languages. Have you heard of those? In 1992 a guy named Gary Chapman wrote the book called Five Love Languages, which lays out five different ways people are wired may tend to receive love: Words of affirmation, Quality time, Physical touch, Acts of service, & Receiving gifts. And this is actually very helpful information to know about ourselves, (if we are married) about our spouse, and our friends, because our love languages - the way we best receive love - are often different. So let’s say one of my spouse’s love languages is ‘words of affirmation’, but that’s not one of mine. My tendency is going to be to love my spouse through my languages, because that comes easiest. But if I really want my spouse or friend to receive my love and feel loved, I’m going to learn what their love languages are and try to love them in those ways, even though it is more challenging for me.

you need it, like we need each other - then I hope that the words of Paul encourage you to continue along that path. But if not, if we're stuck engaging Church in an individualistic way - as a transaction between us and God - I hope we'll begin to give Godly fellowship a chance, and pray for courage to take risk for deeper relationships. Because the Lord teaches that do we need one another. Will we ask him to teach us to need one another and to love one another?

As St. Paul writes, "**4** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6** Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. **8 (And)** Love never fails."

Will you pray with me?

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.

to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen.

O divine Master, grant that (we) may not so  
much seek

-A Prayer of St. Francis

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Excerpt on 1 Cor 12:3

from Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians  
By Kenneth E. Bailey · 2011

What does it mean to confess "Jesus is Lord"? Marianne M. Thompson offers a thoughtful definition: "To confess that Jesus is Lord is not to confess that in him we have found a way to God, but that in him God has embodied a way to us."<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the confession "Jesus is Lord" for Paul was not a rationally provable concept. Logic cannot force the mind to that affirmation. The empire said "Caesar is *Kurios* [Lord]." Anyone who affirmed "Jesus is Lord" was also saying, "Caesar is *not* Lord," and such a claim was dangerous. The Gnostics were safe. They were only interested in the inner life of the soul and its access to salvation through secret knowledge. But Christians who wanted the kingdom of God to come *on earth* (Mt 6:10) were thereby challenging the cult of the empire. Only the Holy Spirit could move the heart, mind and will to the dangerous and mysterious affirmation "Jesus is Lord." There was no other way.