

May 24th message

We probably don't think too much of the gifts we possess from the Holy Spirit, but we all have them. Sometimes we may not appreciate them like we should. Perhaps we've been at a birthday party for a young child. They have lots of gifts to open and they can hardly wait and when it comes time to do that they usually go for the big ones first. Parents usually say open the open the card first, see who it's from. That lasts about two seconds. Then the package gets opened. Maybe it's clothes for a boy that he really needs. Mom and Dad are grateful but the kid was hoping for a toy, so he grabs the next one. Yes, I'm speaking from experience with three boys as grandchildren. They are grateful but maybe there is something better in the next one.

Older folks can be like that too, with our gifts we have from the spirit. We can be good at something like managing our property and equipment, resources and time. We know how to fix things and coordinate what needs to be done. We know how to manage a household and all the activities in order to make things run smoothly. This is just part of who we are, maybe we've never thought of these things are gifts of the Spirit, but that's what they are.

We read 1st Corinthians 12 and we may not recognize some of these gifts at work in our lives. We hear about the gifts of distinguishing between spirits and the speaking and interpretation of tongues and we think well, I don't have those and we can be tempted to count ourselves short.

We look at others like wisdom and knowledge and not realize how they have long been part of who we are. In many cases these gifts were nurtured in us by those who raised us and others who influenced us our whole lives. If we think of our definition of wisdom we think of the ability to be wise, which really doesn't help define it. Yet if we see wisdom as the ability to apply God's truth to practical situations, making decisions aligned with His will, we get a better understanding. Chances are we use this gift all the time, not only in day to day living but in how we view current events. We, in as the saying goes, take everything with a grain of salt. We are not fooled by scams and those who would try to deceive us.

Sometimes we hear of someone who has been cheated out of a large sum of money. And we hear how embarrassed they are to come forward. We hear “if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” We also question those who make promises and tell us lies. We recognize their deceit and how they are only concerned for themselves. We are living through what I would call some very deceitful times. There is so much information available to us. We don’t know who to trust or believe. We need the gift of wisdom the Spirit has given to discern those who would try to fool us.

It’s the same for knowledge, we apply the insight we have learned over the years with a basic understanding of what is best especially in spiritual matters. What we voted on recently changing the status of membership to once a member always a member speaks to this. In our mobile society people have moved away, yet they still considered this their church home. Perhaps they have become inactive in their faith, perhaps not. Perhaps they no longer met our former definition of an active member, but they still think of this as their home church. I think the Spirit led us in this decision to drop inactive membership from our by-laws.

Years ago in a church I know an interim pastor wanted to update the membership list. Many of those who had been baptized or confirmed in the church had moved away and some still in the area had not met the active membership criteria. Many of those who were contacted felt the church was trying to dismiss them. This led to many hurt feelings. While I see both sides of this issue, one being how a member should be active in what you belong to, I also see the other side of always feeling like you are still a part of the church. It can be a tough to discern where the Holy Spirit might be leading, but through prayer, careful consideration, and frank conversation good decisions can be made.

Many of us also have some other gifts that we may not think of as Spiritual gifts. Take faith, for example. Everyone has some measure of faith, but as we all know, in the words of James, “faith without works is dead.” It must be put into practice regularly in order to strengthen it. We’ve all been through difficult times in our lives, some of us more than others. The most faithful people I know are those who ‘put things in God’s hands.’ We’ve all heard that and may practice it especially in times of trouble. But the real test of faith is to approach every day that way. Often we put our faith in ourselves and our own abilities in different situations because of our experience. A strong faith doesn’t only go to the Lord in certain situations; it seeks guidance and direction on everything. Perhaps you’re familiar with acronym for F,A,I,T,H: Forsaking all I trust Him.

And finally let us look at healing and the working of miracles. Now you might be saying these are two gifts I definitely don’t have. We may think of a type of healing that defies known medical science. And yes, sometimes we see this. We’ve all heard or watched movies in which a healing takes place because of the faith someone had in work of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the most famous is the movie *Breakthrough* based on an incident that happened not far from here.

On Jan. 19, 2015, John Smith, 14, was playing with two friends out on the frozen Lake Sainte Louise in St. Charles, Mo., when they fell through thin ice. His two friends were rescued, but John had slipped under and sank to the bottom where he remained for 15 minutes. First Responders retrieved his lifeless body and did CPR. He was transported to the nearest hospital where CPR was performed for an additional 43 minutes. When John’s mother, Joyce, arrived at the hospital, the doctors prepared to tell her that her son had died. She began praying loudly over her son’s body. She tells how, “The minute I prayed ‘Holy Spirit, please come and give me back my son!’ his heartbeat started.” Not only was John revived but he made a full recovery, despite multiple organ failure and little to no neurological function. This amazed doctors and led his deeply religious family and community to credit the power of faith and prayer.

Think what you will of this true life story. Often we underestimate our own abilities and what the Spirit can do in our lives. Healing takes place all the time, I can think of several I've known over the years who have fought health battles at one time or another. Sometimes the fight is lost, but often against the odds recovery is gained. Small miracles happen every day. Much of the time our abilities combined with the Holy Spirit accomplish things we didn't think possible.

I my study of this passage I learned some church traditions also recognize the gifts of administration and helps. Again we may not think of ourselves as gifted in those two areas, but if we look closely at our lives and how those words are defined we can be pleasantly surprised. Anything one does to organize and lead touches the area of administration. And yes, I see a lot of that here, not only in the life of the church, but in what you do for a living. And whether we realize it or not what church tradition calls helps is a big part of many of our lives. Any kind of service work falls under this category. These gifts complement the primary nine gifts and emphasize practical service within the church.

Today on this Pentecost Sunday, I wanted to emphasize how all of us have different gifts and how we need to use them. Every year on this Sunday we hear the Acts reading about a rushing wind and tongues of fire resting on those first disciples. We may think, wow that was pretty cool but what's that got to do with me here and now. Often we look at all that is not right in our country and world and conclude all is lost. I've even had younger, healthy folks tell me they wish the Lord would take them to their heavenly home, to which I say, "God ain't done with you yet." God ain't done with any of us yet. God has given us the gifts of the Spirit to use and proclaim the good news. May we be faithful in the task before us. Amen.