

## 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

### To Each Is Given a Gift

Sunday July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015

The last several weeks as I thought about Methodist pastors moving from one church to another at this time of the year it occurred to me the situation is very much like an arranged marriage. Two people or in this case a pastor and a church are brought together by a third party who knows the gifts and graces of both and figures they would make a great match.

I know one couple from India who were brought together in an arranged marriage. They told me they met for the first time 20 minutes before the wedding ceremony and then they were married. That was nearly 40 years ago and their marriage is still going strong. They had 2 sons, and now I don't remember how many grandchildren, but they were brought together because her parents knew his parents in the Mar Toma church and thought they would make a great match and they were right. But it was the parents as a third party that brought them together.

Simon, the dad, worked with me in the youth ministry for about 8 years at FUMC of Mesa. He got very frustrated at times because in that huge group (we had about 60 active) only two of them could relate to him. Several times I talked him out of quitting by reminding him that if he wasn't there who would those kids relate too? Simon was vitally important to those two boys.

Now in our situation the 3<sup>rd</sup> party is the Holy Spirit with the Bishop and Cabinet being the intermediaries. The Church, in fact every local church is brought into being by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that brings us together and gifts each of us as the local church needs.

Now I know many of you are very curious about me and me about you. You wonder if I will like you and want to be here and the answer to that question already is yes!! I am loving it here, and we will grow to love each other through the years.

I don't move around much compared to most UM pastors. The first church I served under fulltime appointment I was there for 21 years and the last for 10. I believe I need to bloom where God plants me.

Now as to my preaching here is what I like to do. Often my messages are what are called "expository" messages. I go verse by verse or section by section through a passage of scripture. In my sermons I try to get people to ask and answer two of the most important questions in our spiritual lives: "What is God saying to me?" and "What am I going to do about it?" I try to make the Bible clear enough that you can hear God and inspiring enough that you can respond.

Now here's how my preaching works. In verse 3 it makes it clear that the source of our belief and faith is the Holy Spirit. Verse 3 says, "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord!' except under the influence of the Holy Spirit."

That in fact is the oldest confession of faith of the Christian Church. Can you say that with me? **Jesus is Lord!** Let's say that with power, "Jesus is Lord!" Indeed the Spirit is powerfully present here.

Now verses 4-6 are an aside for this message today but they are one of the clearest delineations of the doctrine of the Trinity and I would refer you back to them.

Now the heart of this passage is verse 7, "To each has been given a gift of the Spirit for the good of all." This is one of my favorite verses in the New Testament for its promise and practicality.

It reminds us that every single one of us has gifts of the Holy Spirit. If you can say "Jesus is Lord" and have been baptized you have gifts of the Holy Spirit. Now you might say to yourself, "I have no gifts, or my gifts are too small, or they don't matter anymore," but they do! Within the church often the smallest most hidden and seemingly insignificant is vitally important. Like Simon to those two boys.



On the screen now are the bones within our ears set beside a dime. I want us to focus on the “stapes” ear bone. It is also referred to as the “stirrup bone” because it looks like a stirrup. In the picture it is the smallest bone next to the dime. It is actually the smallest bone in our bodies. It is about 1/10 of an inch long. Small, seemingly insignificant and hidden, but we couldn’t hear without it. You and your gifts are vitally important to the health and functioning of the Body of Christ no matter how small and insignificant you think they are!!!

I believe in every Methodist church in the land has a kitchen steward or hostess or cook. They go by many names. Their work is often behind the scenes and unnoticed by most.

But you and I know the unpublished motto of every United Methodist church is **“We meet to eat and we eat to meet.”** Right? When we get to heaven we won’t be wearing a yumaka or crucifix, we’ll be carrying a Pyrex dish. We couldn’t do church without our kitchen hostesses and they go all the way back to Jesus sitting down to dinner with his disciples.

Now are you too old to receive, or discover or use gifts of the Holy Spirit? No! In the church I served while in Seminary I meet a man named John Ellis. John was 104 years old when I met him. Every Sunday he walked up the 30 marble steps of the Greek Temple like church and sat in the front row about 3 seats over in front of the pulpit.

Now John was blind and almost totally deaf. One day I overheard a man ask John a rather rude question. It was easy to overhear what anyone said to John because you had to yell. But this man said to John, “Why do you bother to come to church? You can’t see and you can’t hear?” John stiffened and stood straight up and said, “To show whose side I am on.” That little interchange has inspired me for more than 35 years. What a gift John gave me that day. He passed on at 107.

I didn't learn I could preach until I was in my 40s. I had helped start a contemporary service at FUMC of Mesa and the head pastor said, "Since you helped think it up you can preach it." As I preached that service I grew in my gift until one day I got a call from the DS which went like this, "Fred, we are sending you to Christ Church in Tucson and want to know your answer by noon tomorrow."

Many years ago I was involved in a seminar called "Every Member in Ministry", which is based on the verse "To each has been given a gift of the Spirit for the good of all." One woman who was in charge of that program for a Mega Church told about a recently retired engineer who came to her with a great idea to train missionaries in how to use computers. In his retirement he was looking for a ministry to pursue for he knew many of his fellow retirees from his company died within 18 months of retirement.

Many thought it was because they no longer had a sense of purpose that their jobs provided. So this woman encouraged him to make a proposal for the ministry which he did. Soon afterward he with the help of several other retired engineers launched a worldwide computer ministry for missionaries.

There are many more gifts of the Holy Spirit than are listed here in 1 Corinthians and even other places in the New Testament. All the lists like you see in verses 8-10 are simply representative lists. The point is in verse 11 "But all these gifts are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses." The bottom line is that we need each other. If any person and their gift is missing the whole Body of Christ, the Church suffers and we in some way suffer without each other.

The gifts given you by the Holy Spirit are not given for you. They are given to you for another.

Here is a true story of 2 women from the Upper Room Devotional.

"With her legs twisted from 2 gruesome automobile accidents, she was unsteady walking to the altar for Holy Communion. Holding tightly to each pew along her route, she wore an expression that discouraged

offers of assistance. “Yes”, her eyes seemed to say, “It is a struggle. But I intend to make it on my own!”

Suddenly, someone nudged her from behind. Her face flushed with resentment but only for the instant it took her to regain her balance. The person who touched her was someone else struggling to make it, someone who did not see the expression that discouraged others from helping; it was someone who was blind. She allowed the blind woman to take her arm.



As the two struggled to the altar, something happened. The unsteady one became the eyes for the blind one who supported her. They reached the altar together, and they shared the sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ, who healed the lame and made the blind to see.

In some way or another, we are all struggling along on this journey towards God. In love, God brings us together as the church.... to help us..... help each other..... through that struggle.”

The church is a body. It is the body of Jesus Christ. Verse 12 says, **“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.”**

We need to play our part, exercise our gift(s) in the Body, or else others stumble blind and we ourselves will be unable to walk.

We are a body and without prophets we would be deaf to the will of God. We are a body and without Apostles and those with the gifts of “helps” we would get nothing done. We are a body and without those with the gift of “administration” we would be a disorganized mess.

We need each other... and the gifts each has to bring.



But as much as we need each other we need Jesus even more. He is the head of the Body from whom all blessings flow. He is the Gift given to pay for our sins and in the sacrament of Holy Communion we will remember this.

So what has God said to you? What are you going to do?

Let us prepare our hearts to receive.