

# *“Which Gift Has God Given You?”*

*Pentecost*

*I Corinthians 12:3b-13, Acts 2:1-2, John 20:19-23*

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From the Pulpit

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A Communion Meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Tim Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Pentecost Sunday, June 4, 2017, dedicated to Don Erickson as he begins cancer treatment, to Alec Deitz, our Sr. Deacon and to the men and women of the church in Corinth and First Congregational Church in Columbus who had the courage to start a church and learn along the way what gifts God had given them and to the next generation of men, women and children in the Christian Church who will bless us with countless gifts of love for generations to come and always to the glory of God!

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First, let me thank The Ohio State University Alumni Men’s Glee Club, under the direction of our own Jim Gallagher and Dr. Andrew Crow this morning. You have brought the spirit of God into our midst through your powerful and passionate music. Second, thank you to the First Church choirs who have graced us with their voices and bells throughout the year and now will take a break. Thanks as well to our readers for the Pentecost story – (9:00 a.m. – Julie, Alyssa and Kevin) and (11:00 a.m.) Janet Newcity (in for our Sr. Deacon Alec Deitz

who is resting in Cincinnati having been overcome by heat stroke yesterday), Alejandro, Lissa and Antoinette whose gifts of language awakened us to the Spirit's presence.

I have written a book on Acts. I have preached on Acts 2:1-21 thirty-two times – at least. Today, once again, we have heard how the wind of the Holy Spirit blew through the people in Jerusalem on Pentecost to create the church of Jesus Christ, but I Corinthians 12:3b-13 tell us how the Holy Spirit shaped the church – one by one with spiritual gifts. So, my question is “Which Gift has God given you?”

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.*

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The cities of Columbus and Corinth seem to have a lot in common. Except for the 2000 years separating our existences, each city was (and is) cosmopolitan, bursting with activity, filled with interesting people, new ideas and new trends, many great employment opportunities, cultural activities and a great love of athletics (Corinth being close to Mt. Olympus, the

heart of the Olympic games (and Columbus being centered around Ohio Stadium where The Ohio State Men's Glee performs and wins Olympic like titles on a regular basis).

The big difference between the cities is one was a port city on a peninsula that connected Greece with Peloponnesus and sits between the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas and while Columbus is not a port city (Even though we have Port Columbus International Airport – now John Glenn International) and sits between the Scioto and Olentangy Rivers.

Over 2000 years separate our city's stories, but one story connects us for all time. It is the story of the Christian church formed by the Apostle Paul in the early 50's AD – only about 17 years after the story of the church's birth on Pentecost. Paul found in the Corinthians an eagerness to learn about Jesus, the Risen Messiah, and a willingness to follow him. Their attempts to follow Jesus were "bumpy" at best and immoral, licentious, incestuous and divisive at worst – behaviors that Columbus Christians have never demonstrated (I'm kidding of course).

Into this mix, Paul turns to his brothers and sisters in Christ and calls them to higher ground. He calls them to step into the blessings which God has given them. He calls them to Higher Ground. In I Corinthians 12: 3b-13, the chapter which

appears just before the famous love chapter, Paul tells his parishioners they are gifted. Through the Holy Spirit, God has gifted them with powers for living and serving God and humanity.

These gifts include Gifts of Prophecy, Service to others, Teaching, Exhortation (or speaking before others), Giving, Leadership, Mercy, Wisdom, knowledge, Faith, Healing, Miracles, Discernment of Other Spirits, speaking in tongues, Understanding and Interpreting those who speak in tongues, Discipleship, Administration, Helping, Evangelism, and Pastoring. These are 20 of the 30+ spiritual gifts inventoried in the New Testament. In offering this list of gifts, Paul is trying to help his church members claim and own and live into the gifts God has given them through the Holy Spirit.

I can picture Paul's little church with 20 or more people. As he spoke with them, he was looking in their eyes and saying, "Felix, I see the Holy Spirit gifting you with Administrative gifts. You are really talented with numbers and the ability to keep track of all the details. We need you to step up and help us keep track of things. Are you willing and able to do that?" "Chloe, I have watched you with people. God has gifted you with the ability to help. You set the tables and bring us the food during our dinners. We wouldn't have communion without your baking and bringing the bread and buying the

wine at the market. Thank you. Can you live into these gifts of the spirit and keep helping us and others who join us?”

I can see Paul coming to the Corinthian Youth in Mission and saying, “We are sending you off to Athens to care for the poor on the streets of our nation’s capital. You are serving others. Can you serve them with the love of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit?... thank you!”

Administration, Helping and Service are three of the most important gifts of the Holy Spirit named in the New Testament. How often have you seen your gifts with numbers and your gifts with answering phones, picking up papers, handing out bulletins on Sunday and helping our members who need rides to church because they can’t drive anymore as a ‘Gift of the Holy Spirit?’ How often have you thought of painting houses, cleaning out sheds, caring for children in an inner-city summer camp program as a Gift of the Holy Spirit?

While preaching, exhortation, teaching and healing get all the press, the church through its past 2000 years has been blessed mightily with billions of sisters and brothers who offered service, ran the administrative life of the church, and simply “helped.” Thanks be to God!

While teaching the 30 Spiritual gifts years ago, I was finished one evening and everyone in the class of 40 had gone home –

except one. Ella was in the kitchen, finishing her cleaning up and crying. I heard her crying before I saw her. I turned the corner and found her sitting on the stool she so often sat on. The kitchen was clean but the tears were flowing. She turned to me and embarrassed to have me find her in tears. She said, “I am so sorry. But, all of a sudden, I became overwhelmed with joy. Tonight, you said, one of the most important gifts of the Holy Spirit is helping. I have been a faithful member of the church all my life. But, not until tonight, did I feel I had anything to contribute. Everyone else seems to be able to teach and preach and so much more. All I can do is help. But, helping is a spiritual gift. Wow! It is overwhelming for me to think of cleaning the kitchen as gift from the Holy Spirit. Thank you.” As I embraced Ella, she wiped her tears, finished straightening the kitchen, turned out the lights and headed out the door – the last to leave – as usual.

Which gift or gifts of the Spirit has God given you? You must have some idea what your gift is? If you are not sure, see your beloved family members or see me. Please write it down before you leave today.

Once you have identified the gift, what prevents you from using your gift?

What excuses have you given or heard from others about gifts not shared?

In what ways can you help others identify their gifts (Which is a gift of the Spirit in and of itself – called discernment).

As we celebrate Pentecost today and head out into this week, please commit to do one thing this week to share your gift with someone else. May God bless you First Church and all our guests on this Pentecost Sunday to name, claim, and use the Spiritual Gifts which God has given you. Amen.

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