

2020 05 31 – Gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

This month I officiated at four graveside services. All of them were graveside because that was the only option we had. At each service there were ten people or less because that was the number that was allowed. But the location of the service and the size of the congregation didn't make the ritual any less important or sacred. In each case, we were there to honour, to remember and to say good bye to someone who had lived, loved and shared their gifts here on this earth.

Every time I prepare a funeral service, I include in the pastoral prayer a place where we give thanks for the gifts that the deceased offered to the world. And I've never had any trouble coming up with at least three or four gifts to include. Back in 2007, I did a funeral for a man named Robbie. Robbie was born with Down 's syndrome and lived with his parents his entire life. But he also worked, had hobbies, loved music and brought great joy to everyone who knew him. At his funeral, I gave thanks for "the enthusiasm and the passion that he brought to living, for all in him that was generous and kind; and for the incredible amount of love that he gave and received.

In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, the apostle talks about the diversity of gifts that we are given by the Spirit. He lists such gifts as: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, discernment, tongues and even miraculous powers.

Some of the gifts are character traits and others are skills. We all have spiritual gifts that we have been given.

At this time I am going to invite you to name some the gifts that you have been given and to type them in the chat, write them on a piece of paper, or say them out loud. Name the gifts that your family and friends will include in your obituary or eulogy. Now some of you have been given the gift of humility and are thinking, "I can't do that, that would be boasting," Think of it as prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving to the Creator, the Holy Mystery, the Spirit of Pentecost. As you type, or write or recite your gifts, pray a prayer of gratitude. And as you share your gifts in the chat, I will read some of them so that we can all appreciate the incredible abundance that exists amongst us. Our congregation has spiritual gifts that include: (*leadership, engineering, public speaking, intuition, compassion, creativity, cooking, farming, baking, humour, laughter, patience, perseverance, craftsmanship....*) We are a congregation filled with the gifts of the spirit and it is good to give thanks for all that we have been given!

Today we recognized nine high school graduates, nine young men and women who are just beginning their journey in life. You who are graduating have, no doubt, already had opportunities to develop and to share some of the gifts that you have been given. Through church, school, 4-H, band, sports and other activities you have had opportunities to test and to grow your abilities. But all of you also have gifts that still need to be discovered, to be nurtured and to be celebrated!

I have to tell you that when I graduated with my MBA in 1985 and started working full-time for IBM Canada, I certainly had no idea that 20 years later I would be travelling to Saskatchewan and starting a whole new career as a United Church minister. Yes, it was more than a little scary to leave my job and go back to

school, but I knew I had to follow my call and I knew I had gifts that needed to be used. When we nurture the gifts that we have been given, when we follow where the Spirit leads us, then our lives will be fulfilled.

So I invite the graduates, and everyone in this congregation, to keep exploring, keep trying new things. This week I read an article about a woman named Sarah Yerkes who didn't begin writing until she was in her 90s, and last July, at the age of 101, released her first collection of poems called, *Days of Blue and Flame*.

The article said:

A graduate of Harvard University's Graduate School of Design and a 74-year resident of Washington D.C., Yerkes had decades-long careers in both landscape architecture and sculpture before Henry Morgenthau III—a friend from Ingleside retirement community where she now resides (as well as a fellow centenarian poet)—encouraged her to join him at a monthly workshop, wherein she discovered her poetic voice.

<https://lithub.com/is-this-the-oldest-debut-author-in-history/>

We are never too old to discover new gifts of the spirit! We are never too old to encourage others to do the same!

Once our gifts have been discovered and nurtured, it is important to remember that they must also be shared. The apostle, Paul, put it this way, "To each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." More recently Rick Warren wrote, "Your spiritual gifts were not given for your own benefit but for the benefit of others, just as other people were given gifts for your benefit."

Think about the list that you just typed, or wrote or said aloud. How have you been sharing those gifts with others? What more can you do in the future? Think of the time in which we are living. During this pandemic, what could you be doing to help those who are sick, those who are isolated, those who struggle with poverty, and those who are working while caring for children at home? How can you use your spiritual gifts to help others stay healthy and safe?

Most scholars agree that when Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth, he was responding to a division that was starting to form in their church. Some of the parishioners were complaining because their gifts were not seen to be as important as others. Paul made it clear that all gifts are necessary and important and that “it is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts and distributes them as she wills.”

We have never been more aware of the importance of all gifts than we are now in the midst of this pandemic. In this time when most of us have stayed in our homes it has been those on the front-lines, those working in meat-packing plants, those driving trucks, those working as grocery clerks and cleaners, those caring for the ill and the aged, who have continued to work and to put themselves at risk. Many of these people are paid at the low-end of the salary scale, but their contribution to our society and our well-being has now been highlighted like never before!

Paul goes even further and explains that each and every person in the congregation is also an important member of the single body that is the church.

He writes:

The body is one, even though it has many parts; all the parts – many though they are – comprise a single body. And so it is with Christ. It was by one Spirit that all of us, whether we are Jews or Greeks, slaves or citizens, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit.

Here at First United Church, we are an amazing mix of Spirit-filled people with many gifts to share with each other, with our community and with the world! Thanks be to the Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit of gentleness, the Spirit of wind and fire!