

Psalms 128:1(ESV) ¹Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! ²You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. ³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. ⁴Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. ⁵The Lord bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! ⁶May you see your children’s children! Peace be upon Israel!

Isaiah 62:1-5(ESV) ¹For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. ²The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. ³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. ⁵For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

John 2:1-11(ESV) ¹On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

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Lutheran Church

2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

Spiritually Gifted

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (ESV) ¹Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³Therefore 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. ⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to 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. ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Using the term “Gifted” when describing or referring to someone may conjure up mental images of specialness. When we say that a certain person is a “Gifted” athlete, this usually indicates that on a comparison scale—we rate this person much higher than a normal performer. The term “Gifted” is also frequently applied to someone with extraordinary musical talents. We’ve all see “Gifted” performers in the areas of sports, music, and even academic achievements. Gifted people are considered to be a “notch” above the regular crowd in some area of life. With that general understanding of “giftedness”, it only makes sense that the Church would have Spiritually Gifted people among its membership—people that appear to be a “notch” above ordinary members.

That statement seems to indicate that the Lord is playing favorites in His Church. And from the perspective of some folks, that would certainly seem to be the case. After all, we all acknowledge the Lord as our Creator; yet, we’re all different with our appearance, abilities, talents, and desires. If someone isn’t satisfied with the way that he or she is, that person may accuse the Lord of favoritism because he or she isn’t exactly what someone else is. There will always be people who aren’t pleased with the way the Lord put them together—and they will often place the blame for their dissatisfaction upon the Lord. Countless self-help books have been written encouraging people to be all they can be. And the key words for us to notice here are “can be.” We shouldn’t aspire to be what we weren’t created to be.

And here’s our first “Ah Ha!” this morning. When everyone comes into the physical world, they were fashioned and molded in a certain way. Their genetic makeup determined much of what their physical framework would be when they matured. There was a cartoon in the newspaper a while back that showed a little boy looking at a picture of his father and then asking, “Mommy, do I have to look like Daddy when I grow up?” Like it or not, we all came into this world with the natural inclination to be somewhat similar to our parents. So based on our parenthood, some options were available to us—while others were not. Opportunities and limitations are spread out before us from the moment we come into this world. Physically, we are all products of our parents—with whatever associated benefits and restrictions that may infer. But from a spiritual aspect, all of us have been born again; we became new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). This new birth made us eligible for a different kind of giftedness—one that we refer to as Spiritually Gifted (1 Corinthians 2:14). The opportunities and limitations of this giftedness are determined by our spiritual parentage—the Lord God Himself!

Like most of you, I was baptized as an infant, taught to pray by my mother, attended Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, and was confirmed. I had the spiritual upbringing that pointed me toward the path of righteousness. And I followed that path—for a time, but then I gradually became distracted. By the time I was discharged from the Army, I was only attending worship sporadically. That infrequent worship participation continued as I married and began to raise my children. But the light of the Lord God reappeared in my life a bit later and He called me back into His fold. Shortly after He called me back, I heard what I considered to be the “silent” voice of God in my head. Without expanded explanation or any fanfare whatsoever, the silent voice simply said, “You are to teach.” There were no more instructions at that time.

I prayed about and pondered what I believed I had heard and wondered exactly what it meant. I took it to mean that I was to teach others what I had come to know about the Lord. Up to that point in my life, teaching anyone anything was very low on my list of things I liked doing. At work, I thought teaching others was mostly a distraction for me. When I had to teach others, it usually went like this: “Grab a notebook and pen. Write down what I tell you, because I’m only going to tell you once!” That was the scope of my teaching others. But even with these limitations and poor past experiences, I now knew I was to attempt to teach a Bible Study. So, I looked for an opportunity to teach one at my church. It wasn’t long before the opportunity arose. I volunteered and began teaching a small group of adults, who were in my age group, one night a week. We went through one of the shorter books of the New Testament—Galatians as I recall.

There was also a Bible Study that met during the lunch hour, one day a week, where I worked. I had been attending this group on a regular basis. Not long after my “silent” visit with the Lord about teaching, I was asked by this group—about ten of my fellow workers—to lead this class. Remembering the Lord’s words to me, I immediately said that I would. I taught that class at work for the next eight years or so—right up until the time I began studying to become a pastor.

There were two important things I learned about spiritual gifts with these experiences. First, when God gifts you to do something—there will be an opportunity. And secondly, the presence of spiritual gifts is confirmed by your fellow believers. Your brothers and sisters in Christ will recognize the area(s) where you are spiritually gifted. Because every test I’ve seen that claims to identify spiritual gifts that a person may possess primarily deal exclusively with what a person has already tried or experienced, I usually tell people to try out all the areas of spiritual giftedness (Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, Romans 12, and 1 Corinthians 12). Because we are the much-loved children of God through Christ Jesus, we can ask for any of the spiritual gifts. But the Holy Spirit disperses these gifts according to His discretion and timing (Romans 1:11; 12:6). The Church, that is individual congregations, has all the spiritual gifts it needs (1 Corinthians 1:7). Every believer has at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 7:7). And the gifts are to be used to build up the Body of Christ.

Likely, we’ve all come across our share of “show-offs” in our lives. These attention-seekers seem to enjoy displaying their apparent superiority in public situations where many others can observe. It may be that they’re displaying their quick wit, their physical strength, their agility, or whatever ability they believe to be worthy of public display. I remember watching a “slam-dunk” show before a basketball game where many players impressed the watching audience with their physical dexterity as they twisted and sailed through the air on their way to jamming a basketball into that iron hoop. It was an impressive presentation of athletes displaying—or showing off—their physical talents for the purpose of entertaining an audience.

Much of the time, we don’t care for people showing off without having a good reason. Watching a football player make a one-handed catch—when that’s the only way the catch could be made—is applauded by the sportscasters and viewing audience. But the same player making a one-handed catch when it’s not required is just seen as being a little foolish and showing off. We might observe the same when it comes to spiritual giftedness. When we use the gifts that the Holy Spirit has imparted to us as they are intended to be used, our fellow believers are uplifted and encouraged by our Lord’s goodness to His people. However, when the gift is used only to “show off,” people are not impressed. In fact, they are kind of “turned off.”

Too often when the topic of Spiritual Gifts arises, there are visions of someone babbling away in a contrived language, hands waving in the air, and perhaps even people jumping around. In past years, the denominations that were openly identified with the Charismatic Movement were referred to as “Holy Rollers.” Although you wouldn’t typically see any holy rolling in a conservative Lutheran Church, we do—however—believe in Spiritual Gifts. We believe and teach that the Holy Spirit imparts these gifts for the common good (v. 7) of the believers. These gifts are not given for the purpose of anyone showing off; rather, these gifts are given to help and solidify the believing community.

We are members of the Church of Jesus Christ—the Church for which our Lord willingly gave His life on the cross. Humanity’s archenemy, the devil, inflicted his vile and twisted will upon our Garden ancestors and all their offspring. Without a second thought, the evil one ushered person after person into eternal damnation. Only those holding on to the promise of a coming Messiah and following the Lord’s sacrificial system escaped the devil’s snare. Few were saved; most were damned. But Jesus came to change all that. His death on the cross was for all people, for all sins, for all time. The complete redemption price for the entire human race—from the beginning all the way to whenever the end is—was paid by Jesus on that Roman instrument of torture identified as a cross. And the personal and individual transition from being on the road to damnation to the pathway that leads to eternal life is accomplished by believing in Jesus (Acts 16:31).

Just as the Holy Spirit gifts believers for their common good—and to build up His Church with His special brand of Spiritual Giftedness—He also enables people to believe the Gospel message and helps them place their trust in Jesus. Simply stated, the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus is just too good and too simple for mere humans to believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). Logically, the way to be saved just doesn't make reasonable sense to the natural mind of man. But it does to God Almighty.

God understood that we couldn't save ourselves and that we couldn't even contribute one little, tiny thing to our own salvation. Sin had made us stone, cold dead—from a spiritual aspect (Ephesians 2:1,5). We needed divine intervention if anyone was to be saved. From the beginning when God first promised a Savior (Genesis 3:15) to the end when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, it was ALL God's doing. He made the promise; He made the plan; He sent Jesus into the world; in the person of Jesus, God died on the cross for you and me and everyone. It was 100% God's doing—without any help from us whatsoever. Exactly the same is true as we made the transition from our natural selves to become children of God. It was all God's doing. He enabled us to believe—and He gave us the gift of faith and placed His Holy Spirit within each of us. And because we have received the gift of eternal life—and because the Holy Spirit resides within us—we are Spiritually Gifted. Praise the Lord!