

“Gifted, Called and Sent”

Date: September 1, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Cor. 12:1-11 Theme: Spiritual Gifts

Occasion: Spiritual Gifts series; Labor Day

Do you know what your spiritual gift is? Bruce Bugbee tells this story in his book *What You do Best in the Body of Christ*: “It wasn’t too long after creation that the animals got together to form a school. They wanted the best school possible – one that afforded their students a well-rounded curriculum of swimming, running, climbing and flying. In order to graduate, all of the animals had to take all of the courses.

The duck excelled at swimming. In fact, he was better than his instructor, but he was only making passing grades at climbing and was getting very poor grades in running. The duck was so slow in running that he had to stay after school every day to practice. Even with practice, there was very little improvement. His webbed feet got badly worn from running, and with such worn feet, he was then only able to get an average grade in swimming. Average was quite acceptable for everyone else, so no one worried much about it, except for the duck!

The rabbit was at the top of her class in running. But after a while, she developed a twitch in her leg from all of the time she spent in the water trying to improve her swimming. The squirrel was a peak performer in climbing, but was constantly frustrated in flying class. His body became so bruised from all of the hard landings, that he did not do too well in climbing anymore and became quite slow in running.

The eagle was continually the problem student. She was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. For example she always beat

everyone else to the top of the tree, but insisted on using her own way to get there.

Each of the animals had a particular area of expertise, their gift if you will. When they did what they were designed to do, they excelled. When they tried to operate out of their area of expertise, they were not nearly as effective. Can ducks run? Sure they can. Is that what they do best? Definitely not.

Well, you get the idea. Just as each of those animals has an area in which he or she excels, so do God's people. The Bible refers to those things as spiritual gifts. It is the recognition that each of us, whether by birth, or by training, or by experience, or by God's special intervention in our lives, each of us has an ability to use for God's special purposes.

We use those spiritual gifts in all areas of our lives, not just for church work. There are some who are gifted, called and sent as school teachers. Others have no patience, tolerance or ability for that particular calling. Some are gifted, called and sent as nurses, having the special gifts of compassion and helps.

On this Labor Day weekend, we celebrate the diversity of gifts that God has bestowed upon people to do the variety of things that need to be done to make society function. As Christians, we need to remember that when we go to work, we are answering God's call to ministry, using the gifts God has given us. Ministry is not just what we do within the walls of the church.

I know of one gentleman, who retired from his previous work in insurance, who is now using his gift of carpentry and handyman-work as a second career. And it has become a ministry. Not only does it provide income for his family, it also provides a valuable service to the people he

helps. He is using his gifts in service to others. He's letting his light shine for the Lord.

Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? I imagine you have some idea of what you're good at. But have you ever taken a spiritual gifts inventory to clarify? I regularly offer this spiritual-gifts-assessment as part of the new member class, and people have told me how surprised they were to discover they were gifted in a particular area.

In your bulletin this morning there is a link offered so that you can go online and take a spiritual gifts inventory. If you haven't done this recently, I invite you to do it. It won't take that long and I think you'll find it quite interesting and enlightening.

Once you discover your gifts, I invite you to think about when and where God wants you to use your spiritual gifts. Are you being asked to use your gift of compassion in the church, caring for some of our homebound members? Or might God be calling you to use your gift of compassion to care for a loved one at home, or in your neighborhood. Or maybe God is calling you to consider some form of short-term missionary work.

In a couple of weeks, the Lay Leadership Committee will begin meeting again. This is the group in the church which considers the various committees and ministries of the church. Their job is to try to match people's spiritual gifts with the ministries God has called us to do.

Perhaps you have served on a certain committee for a number of years and maybe you're feeling burnt out. Or maybe you feel like a rabbit trying to climb a tree; it isn't a good fit for you. When someone from the Lay Leadership committee calls you, be sure to tell them what your spiritual gifts are, and where you think God might be calling you to serve in this new season of your life.

One of the things I hope will result from us taking the spiritual gifts inventory is that YOU will better know what your spiritual gifts are, so that you will then know in a clearer way how God might be calling you to serve. We can use this as a tool to help us discern God's will for our lives. "God, what is it you would have me doing at this time of my life?"

Now, please hear me, knowing your spiritual gift is not a reason for failing to do service. Just because my spiritual gifts are preaching and administration does not mean I can say to my wife, "I'm sorry, honey, but doing chores around the house is not my spiritual gift."

Sorry, knowledge about your spiritual gift does not always get you out of certain jobs that simply have to be done. Sometimes, even if it isn't our gift, we still need to volunteer to do things, simply because the job needs to be done.

In fact, the truth is, God often chooses the most unlikely of people to serve Him. What may be more important than our gifts is our willingness to be used by God. I pray that as the nominating season gets under way, you will be open to the possibility of service.

Martin Luther called it the priesthood of all believers. The ministry of the church is not delegated to the pastor alone, or even to the paid staff. "I am the church; you are the church; we are the church together;" as the old song goes.

In the coming weeks we'll be talking more about the various ministries of Lakewood United Methodist Church. And we'll be delving deeper into our spiritual gifts. I hope you'll join us for the journey.

May we turn now to the opening prayer found in your bulletins and let us pray together: "Today we give thanks....."