

To Each Is Given

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters,

I do not want you to be uninformed.

You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.

Therefore I want you to understand

that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!"

and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;

and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;

and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

To each is given

the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom,

and to another the utterance of knowledge

according to the same Spirit,

to another faith by the same Spirit,

to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy,

to another the discernment of spirits,

to another various kinds of tongues,

to another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are activated by one and the same Spirit,

who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

To Each Is Given

I Corinthians 12:1-11

January 16, 2022

Rev. Michael Catanzaro (*In Absentia*)

I.

Though we are, by now, well past Christmas I'd like to begin today by talking about gift-giving. Whether you know it or not, right now, by reading this sermon you are giving a gift; a gift to yourself and a gift to God. While this is true every time we pause in our lives to recognize our Creator, and our own place in the Creation (that is to say, to worship) this *particular* Sunday is also a gift you are giving to the preacher and to our family.

As I do with some regularity, this past week I sent a "Pastoral Update" to the Elders and Deacons to keep them informed of what is happening in the life of the congregation they have been called lead, and for which they are responsible. This particular update, however, had to do with what has been going on in my own life and that of my family.

II.

Just prior to Christmas my mother, Nancy Lyon, fell and fractured her hip, rib and vertebrae in her neck. This was just two days before we were set to move her to an Assisted Living facility in the Buffalo area nearer to family. I literally got the call she had fallen, then 5 minutes later got a call that the new facility was ready to receive her; a bitter twist in an already difficult story. After two weeks in Fletcher-Allen Hospital, somehow managing to get her transported to a Rehab facility in Buffalo (another 2 weeks) and, then, a week spent trying to secure an available bed in suitable facility, I am relieved that this past Tuesday she moved into a very pleasant and well regarded Assisted Living facility a few miles from my brother. The past month has seen too many phone calls, endless paperwork, numerous miles driven and the taxing of both head and heart.

III.

All this on top of the usual rigors for a pastor at Christmas; particularly with our annual Christmas Giving Program. I regret to say that was the very first time in 28 years of parish ministry that I did not visit the home-bound the week before Christmas. Part of this was due to COVID, but the other part of it

was the fact that I was simply flat out and tuckered out. To those of you I was unable to visit, or visit sufficiently, please know that you are dear to me and in no way forgotten.

Just as things were starting to resolve and a slower pace restored, we received difficult news which will require Linda and I to be in Allegany, her hometown, this coming Friday and Saturday. Though all is well, and in no way directly dire, this echo of the life we once led there has now called to us over the span of years and made us once again contend with tender matters we had long since “let be.” It will be a difficult journey, to be sure, but also one with the promise of healing which has been a very long time coming.

IV.

Though my intent was to simply inform the Elders and Deacons of all this, one among them (a known scalawag and provocateur) suggested church be cancelled this Sunday so as to relieve some of the burden. Frankly, such an idea never dawned on me; one simply does what one must. The idea was floated to the Elders and Deacons, with all of them being extremely supportive of the idea of cancelling church this Sunday.

Normally, I would not have stood for such a mutiny. However, upon checking Sunday’s weather (well below zero) and given the on-going surge in COVID infections, it seemed like the reasonable and, even, wise course of action; so, the decision was made. It is also a wonderful and very kind gift to offer, and for this Linda and I are deeply grateful.

So, if you tuned-in to the stream this morning and found none; have no fear, you did not miss out on the Rapture. Though there will be no in-person worship, or corresponding live-stream of the service, I felt it import to provide a sermon via email; not out of undue sense of obligation, but because of the truth these events have placed on my heart.

V.

In today’s scripture passage from I Corinthians 12, Paul offers a critical message to the church, the body of Christ: “Now there are varieties of gifts,” he says, “but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the

common good.” Paul goes on to list these gifts of the Spirit: “the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. With all of these being activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”

VI.

Which is great, and wonderful fodder for any pastor preaching to their congregation. I think, though, Paul missed one gift of the Spirit which just might be the most important: kindness. Kindness is not a gift reserved for some, it is a gift of the Spirit given to all. Admittedly, on the face of it kindness may not seem quite as impressive as wisdom, knowledge, prophecy or miracle making. It turns out, though, that kindness actually encompasses each of these other Spiritual gifts and is the very means by which we might make miracles in our own lives, and in the lives of those around us.

As previously revealed, Linda and I often cross-pollenate ideas in her work with women and my work here at the church; with each of us very often receiving the same idea from different quarters or perspectives which serve as a delightful or, even, intriguing compliment. Meaning, I steal a lot of Linda’s ideas for the sermons I offer to you.

VII.

A few Sundays back, in a sermon entitled “The Woo Woo and The Weird of Rejoicing” I told of how a study of rabbits breeding gave rise to the Fibonacci Number/Sequence. Today, I’d like to tell you about another study involving rabbits which yielded a very different, but no less of a startling result.

A graduate of the University of Rochester Medical School, Dr. Kelli Harding MD spent the first part of her career in the ER of New York-Presbyterian Hospital, and is now Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Columbia University Irving Medical Center. Her 2019 book is entitled, *The Rabbit Effect: Live Longer, Healthier and Happier with the Groundbreaking Science of Happiness*,

The book begins with a 1978 study conducted by a team led by a Dr. Robert Nerem to establish the relationship between a high-fat diet and heart health. Dr. Nerem analyzed the number of fatty deposits in the small blood vessels of

a group of New Zealand White rabbits after they were fed a diet high in fat. They expected that all the rabbits would have fatty deposits in their small blood vessels commensurate with their high cholesterol levels, as had already been well established by other researchers.

VIII.

Instead, the unexpected result was that a significant number of the rabbits did *not*. They discovered that the one group of rabbits with far healthier blood vessels was under the care of an especially kind post-doctoral student who treated the animals with love and patience when handling them. A second similar study confirmed that kind treatment can in fact lead to healthier rabbits.

In her book, Dr. Harding uses the study to introduce the more profound ideas that both rabbits and people thrive in community, that health is bolstered by “love, connection and purpose,” and that kind treatment in general can modify health on a molecular, individual, interpersonal, and global level. Though Dr. Harding’s work focuses on the *science* of kindness, our work to today is to focus on the *spirit* of kindness; not as it regards the Woo Woo and the Weird but, rather, the Boo Hoo and the Revered.

IX.

In last week’s sermon I offered the thought that we have a certain latitude in making the bad worse, or the good better. Moreover, that it doesn’t take very much good to make things a whole lot better. This notion has been greatly on my mind of late, particularly with regard to my mother’s recent circumstances, and the events which called us back to Allegany this weekend; though in very different ways.

Owing to my own experiences this past year with our nation’s current health care system, and certainly in having to navigate it on my mother’s behalf these past weeks, I’ve come to realize that if not utterly broken, we are moving in a very terrible direction when it comes to the health and well-being of the general public. Though it is, admittedly, only anecdotal observation, it seems to me that when the health care system works best, or works at all, it is because of one or two people who decide to act with extraordinary and unexpected kindness in defiance of the weight and force of such a lumbering, complex and uncaring bureaucracy.

X.

In contrast to this are those situations where, and relationships in which, one would expect, deserve or be owed even a modicum of kindness. In such instances the absence of kindness, whether by omission or commission, yields devastating and undeserved consequences which can linger a lifetime.

While it is true that in today's scripture reading Paul speaks of the gifts of the Spirit, one could easily go through the passage and replace the word "gift" with the word "responsibility": the responsibility of wisdom, the responsibility of knowledge, the responsibility of faith. Every gift, spiritual or otherwise, bears with it the responsibility of, first, *honoring* the gift and, second, *enjoying* the gift. When this does not happen it sullies not only the gift and the one who has given the gift, but, especially, the one who has received the gift.

XI.

I think that sometimes we all get so caught up in what is required to just to get through our days, and our years, that we forget the weight and the significance behind the words of the Apostle Paul when he says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Though some of these gifts, or manifestations of the Spirit, are found in some and not others, each of us and all of us have received the gift of kindness. Though perhaps not as flashy as knowledge, or impressive as prophecy, kindness has the very real power to heal the body, mend the heart, bind the broken soul, and, literally, work miracles in our lives, our church, our community and our world. Moreover, kindness is a gift which benefits those who give it every bit as much as those who receive it. Kindness is the ultimate "win/win" with no downside whatsoever.

XII.

I truly believe that our congregation is a community of faith which overflows with "love, connection and purpose"; with kindness being the road most often taken. Your gift today to allow me the Sunday off is but one example; there are countless others, though. Moments and milestones where each of you, in your own way, have honored both the gift of kindness and the responsibility we have to the Spirit who gives us such a gift. To each is given...a spirit of kindness; let each of us, now, enjoy giving it unto the world, to each other and to ourselves. Amen.