

Where do I Fit?
Gifts Discernment Sunday
April 17, 2016

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be?²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

1 Corinthians 12 (NIV)

Believe it or not it is once again Gifts Discernment time, the time in which the congregation as a whole discerns the spiritual giftedness of each of our members and attenders and tries to determine where God wants each of us to fit in.

Last Sunday after returning from the men's retreat at Camp Luz, I listened to Pastor Alex's message from our series on Hebrews, the message entitled "Better Together," where the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* writes in Hebrews 10:24,

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Alex's message was outstanding, highlighting that God calls us to practice our faith together, that which goes against just about everything that our very individualized, it's all about me, freedom above everything else, Americanized culture teaches us.

Many people today criticize the church at just about every turn. They say it's too religionized, it's too exclusive, it's not tolerant enough, they sing too many hymns, they sing too many contemporary songs, the sermons are not applicable enough, the sermons are not biblical enough, the pastor is too old, the pastor is too young, what the Bible said way back then doesn't really apply to today – and most of those complaints are from those inside the church. And then there are all those who are outside the church who say I can just be a Christian and not be part of the church. Interestingly the cause of the majority of complaints, both from those outside the church and those inside the church, is the same – our own sense of entitlement, individual preference, it's all about me mentality that has been engrained in us by our highly individualistic American culture.

The correct and biblical response to those who are outside the church that say "well I can just be a Christian and not be a part of the church," is "no, it's not possible." In fact it is impossible!

The Bible says that when one becomes a Christian, when he or she repents from their sinfulness and put's their faith in Jesus Christ, he or she automatically becomes a part of the church, the body of Christ, God's people here on earth during this time period, the church age, which stretches all the way from the time when God sent his Holy Spirit on the early Christians on the Day of Pentecost until Jesus returns. The question is not whether a Christian is part of (a) the church, the question is whether he or she is an active participant in (a) the church?

God's divine ideal is that every Christian be an active participant in a local church. Bill Hybels, the founder and Lead Pastor of Willow Creek Church just outside of Chicago hit the nail on the head when he said many years ago now, "the local church is the hope of the world."

God believes so strongly in the local church that he blesses every single genuine Christian, and I say "genuine Christian" because not everybody who is a part of a church or attends church on a regular basis is a "genuine Christian." A "genuine Christian" is one who truly has repented from their sinfulness (acknowledges it, confesses it, agrees to try and turn from it) and puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. God believes so strongly in the local church that he blesses every single genuine Christian with at least one spiritual gift.

Spiritual Gift – a spiritual gift is a talent, ability, and/or calling given to every believer in Jesus Christ by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit, to be used to build up the body of Christ (the church) and for the glory of God.

Verse 7 of our passage this morning says that, *to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*. To each one – that is everyone. “For the common good” – meaning the common good of the body of Christ. Is it building up the body and is it bringing glory to God?

If we are doing something in the church and it is not for the common good, or it’s not building up the body of Christ, or it’s not bringing glory to God, then it is either not a spiritual gift or we are using it the wrong way.

There are actually four passages in Scripture which talk about spiritual gifts: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:1-8, 1 Peter 4:7-11 and Ephesians 4.

The Council of Elders just finished a book study on the spiritual giftedness written about in Ephesians 4, our Call to Worship this morning. There are many today in the wider church who have been examining that passage closely and are coming to the conclusion that the giftedness that is mentioned there, otherwise known as APEST (Apostolic, Prophetic, Evangelistic, Shepherding and Teaching) are the five primary areas of giftedness which God gives to believers. And then all the other gifts or callings mentioned in the other passages (Romans 12, 1 Cor. 12, 1 Peter 4) are outflows of our primary giftedness.

A description of each of the five primary areas of giftedness is on your outline this morning:

Apostle – one who is sent; an entrepreneur, a pioneer, an adventurer; one who likes to go out; a missionary – either to other parts of the world or in one’s local community.

Prophet – guardian of the truth; one who keeps the movement aligned with God and God’s ways. A prophet is willing to warn when the movement goes off track.

A Christian prophet, or a prophet in N.T. times is different than prophets in O.T. times whom God spoke directly to. New Testament prophets possess the revealed will of God mostly through the Scriptures.

“A Christian prophet is one who has grasped the meaning of Scripture, perceives its relevance to the life of individuals, the Church, or the Nation and is willing to declare the message fearlessly.” David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy*

Evangelist- one who is willing to go out and share the Good News of Jesus Christ and to invite people in. An evangelist’s primary concern is the lost.

Shepherd – one who nurtures and cares for those already in the community.

Teacher – one who is called to share knowledge, wisdom and biblical truth to a specific group of people: children, youth or adults.

Here lies the problem, in most of the churches in America today – we have pretty much eliminated the first three primary gifts and we focus only on the last two. And many churches have put the responsibility of those two primary gifts in one person – the pastor/teacher. Whereas the last two are primary responsibilities inside the church, the other three, especially apostle and evangelist, are primary roles outside of the church. And then we wonder why the church in America is shrinking and not growing?

Alan Hirsch, a very well respected theologian and missiologist today says in his book The Permanent Revolution:

“All five ministries are needed to engender, call forth and maintain a full ministry in the Jesus movement. In fact, all five ministries in dynamic relation are absolutely essential to vigorous discipleship, healthy churches and growing Christian movements.”

Alan Hirsch, *The Permanent Revolution*

Which one(s) of the five primary ministry callings have you been given?

Apostolic – do you have a calling to go out, do new things, an entrepreneur spirit?
For those who have gotten most interested in *The Grove* that might be your primary ministry calling.

Prophetic – do you have a strong passion for the Word of God and how it applies to our lives today – as individuals, the Church, as a nation and do you have a strong urge or need to share that? A true prophet can't keep quiet, even at the risk of reputation, persecution or even death.

Evangelist – do you have a passion for the lost, those who have yet to turn from their sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ as the only hope for salvation? Are you willing to share the gospel message with others and invite them into the church?

Shepherd – is your primary concern for people already in the church? Do you have a strong desire to pray for them, to share an encouraging word, to send a card, to visit when they are sick or in the hospital?

Teacher – Do you feel called not only for you, yourself, to grow in wisdom, knowledge, and the truth of Scripture but do you desire that others grow in that area as well – perhaps it's little children, youth or adults. There is a very good reason why it is sometimes hard to find teachers for certain groups – including the different adult SS classes. Not everyone is called to be a teacher.

But the other side of that is we have often done a pretty bad job of helping people discover their gifts and finding them opportunities to use them. The Holy Spirit in the Bible is sometimes referred to as wind, at other times it is referred to as fire.

The apostle Paul wrote to his young protégé Timothy, encouraging him to grow in his spiritual giftedness, that which Paul saw as preaching (a combination of the spiritual giftedness of prophecy and teaching):

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:6-7 (NIV)

We need to confess that in many churches, including and at sometimes especially, the Mennonite church we have done a very poor job of fanning the flame of certain spiritual gifts. More often than not they have been the more charismatic or as some refer to them as “the sign gifts.” Gifts like “speaking in tongues” and “interpretation of tongues.” Or, the gifts of healing or miracles. Do they not exist anymore? Anybody here have the gift of driving our demons?

Was Jesus a liar? These are Jesus’ last words as recorded in the Gospel of Mark, after his resurrection and before his ascension into heaven:

¹⁵ Jesus said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” ¹⁹ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰ Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Mark 16:15-20 (NIV)

I would say that there is probably a pretty good chance that some people here probably do have those gifts. It is our responsibility to help each other discover our gift or gifts and to fan the flame - not for our own personal use (which was Paul’s warning regarding the speaking in tongues without those who could interpret them) but for the common good, for building up the body, for bringing glory to God. Why is it that we shy away from the sign gifts? Because we Mennonites are too practical, we want to be in control. We would rather give credit to the doctors or medicine for healing than God. Speaking in tongues and interpreting and driving out demons that’s just too far out there. We would rather stay worldly, where it’s quite safe, then step out in faith into the spiritual. The problem with that is we really don’t have much to give credit to and glory to God for.

While we might not say it, we often live like God stopped existing when Jesus was taken back into heaven and He’s going to show up again only when Jesus returns. We stuff away and stifle the Holy Spirit because we’re afraid to let Him out.

Part of us as a congregation participating in the Missional Discipleship Group Initiative, not only do I need to participate in one of the Missional Discipleship Groups but I also need to meet regularly, via video conference, every two weeks with other pastors whose congregations are participating as well, and we too are challenged to grow.

Last week we were focusing on our living the Christian life three dimensionally:

1. Upward (focusing on our relationship with God); 2. Inward (focusing on our relationships with each other); and 3. Outward (going out). We had select a question, from a list of questions, from

each of the three areas that we would want to work on. The question I selected regarding my own relationship with God was “Am I living in the power of the Holy Spirit?” Of course if I really thought I was I wouldn’t have selected that question. And my sense is very few of us are really living in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So the big question today is “where do you fit in?” If we really are genuine Christians, then God has a role for each and every single one of us here at the church. It might be here in the church, it might be going out and making connections, building relationships, inviting people in. Not one is any greater or less than any other. It isn’t what you do which is important, what is important is that you are doing something. Have you figured out what spiritual gift(s) God has given you and are you using it for the common good, for building up the body of Christ and to bring glory to God?

I shared at our first Gifts Discernment Committee meeting last Sunday that you know that 20 - 80 rule that applies to almost every organization which exists, especially volunteer organizations, where 20% of the people do 80% of the work? Well, that rule isn’t supposed to apply to the church. God’s divine rule for the church is that 100% of the people are doing what they were gifted and called to do, or as close to 100% as possible, because there will always be a small percentage who need a break for a season, or have gotten to the age where it is just no longer possible (though I think that percentage is small). I think God has a role in the church for even the most senior members, for the disabled, for all. Again, it’s a matter of us discovering or re-discovering the gift(s) and fanning the flame.

So, Alex and I took some time this week and went through our directory of members and regular attenders to try and determine the percentage of people who are serving in some capacity. It could be behind the scenes, working on the computer, ushering, sound tech, kitchen committee or up front worship leading, music or filling roles in the Christian Education Dept. or helping out at *The Grove*. We took out those that are age 17 and below (though we do have some in that age group that are serving in different roles), as well as those who are away at college, and we took out those 80 and above. The percentage that we came up with of those that are serving at some capacity was 65%. The good news is that 65% is a long way from 20%. The bad news is that it’s also a long way from 100%. I know that because my Dad used to point that out to me when I was in Jr. High School 😊!

Are you part of the 35% or are you part of the 65%? If you are part of the 35% where might God be calling you to fit in? If you are part of the 65% are you serving out of your primary spiritual calling?

Gifts Discernment Packets (in your mailbox) –

Elder position –

All the other open positions and other positions that we anticipate are going to need to be filled over the next year. There are a lot of positions and ministries that the Gifts Discernment Committee doesn’t fill but we need to know who might have the giftedness and calling to serve in those positions.

What we really want to know is what positions you are feeling called to serve in. Every adult should be returning a form. If your term is expiring and you feel called to continue to serve in that position, please fill your name in. If you don't know when your term is expiring and all the others who are serving in the different positions, there is a listing of positions and personnel in the back of the packet. The positions in bold are the ones which are expiring.

Spiritual Gift Inventories (on the narthex table) –

If you are new to the church, or didn't take the time to complete one a couple of years ago, or you might want to see if your's has changed – take one and fill it out and return the ½ page orange colored sheet to my mailbox over the next couple of weeks. In our church wide computer program, Melanie keeps a record of everyone's spiritual giftedness.

Prayer: *Lord, make my life of service worth something; make it sure.
May it be that, at the end of my time here on earth (whenever
that may be) may this collection of dust, this temporary mortal
feeble sinful Christian have achieved something by your grace
that will last to eternity.*

Adapted from prayer by Christopher Ash