

1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Ephesians 6:1-4, Colossians 3:20-21

## “Your Gifts”

A couple of funnies for Father’s Day. One dad wrote, “my kids wanted to surprise me with a good breakfast in bed on Father’s Day, so they put a cot in the kitchen.

And if you think about it, Adam had more trouble than any of the rest of us buying his Father a gift for Father’s Day. I mean, what do you get somebody who’s Everything?

This is probably the most bizarre way I have preached a sermon. I am speaking to my laptop in my kitchen without anyone around.

Let us remind ourselves of who we are and Who brought us here. Repeat after me, “Jesus is Lord”! X3

We are here today because the Holy Spirit of God invited us to be here, and we said “Yes”! In our presence here today, we are the gathered church. We are the body of Christ.

Now there are several metaphors the Bible uses to help us understand what the Church is. It is called “The Body of Christ” and I will look at that more next week as we look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 1 Cor. 12.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Peter we as the Church are referred to as a “spiritual house” and each of us as “Living Stones” of which the house/church is built. I have spoken this in past sermons.

The Church is also “the creation of the Holy Spirit”, which I am speaking to today. The Spirit gives us the faith and the ability to say “Jesus is Lord” which is the confession on which the church is founded.

The Church is also referred to as “A Family”, the Family of God with God as our Father and Jesus as our brother, and all of us brothers and sisters.

And when the Church gathers for Sunday morning worship we engage in a “Divine Drama”. Each of us have a part to play. Some are rather prominent like the organist, the Choir director, the preacher. But we have ushers and greeters and custodians, and you may not think you have part, or a gift, or a job to do when you are here,... but you do.

The church worship service as a Divine Drama has each of you doing your part as you focus on God. My part is the director. The audience is not you, or even the people joining us online. The Audience is God. The audience is God and when we gather together we bring before God the best gift we have which is our very being.

Each of us needs to be here “to practice the gifts God has given us for the good of all” as we lift up our praise and thanksgiving to God.

And again, the Church is the Creation of the Holy Spirit. It began in the Holy wind and Fire of Pentecost and continues to this day as we say yes to God. As we receive and practice the first Gift the Holy Spirit gave to us which is faith to declare to ourselves and the World “Jesus is Lord!”

As a local church grows each person who comes in needs to practice the gifts and graces that God has given them for the body as a whole to Grow. Remember our theme for the year is “Connect and Grow.” We connect first with God through the Holy Spirit and then with one another through the church.

As we grow and change new gifts are needed. 7 years ago, when I was appointed here, we did not have a camera person. Livestreaming our services was a dream of John Goetz and Bill Daniels. We did not have Boxcast Hosts or Facebook hosts, and I must apologize for our down times the last couple of weeks.

The list of gifts that God distributes to the church through his people grows and changes. In our verses today we see these gifts in the early church that are still much needed today: wisdom, knowledge,

healing, faith, and prophecy. More gifts such as administration, helps and teaching we will see next week.

But the beauty I see in the church and one of the reasons why I so fervently, try to bring in new people is verse 12, **“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”** That verse so inspires me in my work that it is on the back of my business cards. I love to see who the Holy Spirit brings to the church and the gifts they bring.

Each and every one of you have gifts given to you by the Holy Spirit that only can be exercised and brought to use within the church. Some of you know exactly what they are. Others are possibly still seeking, but if you haven't found your gift within the church, I implore you to ask of the Holy Spirit for the Spirit is the One who, **“distributes gifts to each one, just as he determines.”**

**Now the Church as a family.** This is the heart of today's message. The message is titled “Your Gifts”. I would submit to you that in terms of gifts given to you by the Holy Spirit, the Family is at the top of the list.

Now the smallest Church that God brings into existence is a husband and wife who are believers. If the couple is young enough, then by natural means, new members are added to this small church, who we call children. Some come in by natural means. Some are adopted and some are fostered. And I know within the church some are just claimed.

The family is the smallest and most important local church for bringing children to faith. Children learn more about God and faith through their parents than they do from church. (Repeat) and this is coming from a man who was a youth pastor for 24 years. Parents have a greater impact on their children's faith than Sunday school classes and youth groups. Sunday School classes and youth groups supplement what the parents do. They are not the major source of faith.

Our children's first image of God is based on their image of their parents and their relationship with their parents.

Now within the family, Father's play a crucial role in children's development of faith. I can't emphasize enough their crucial role. Fatherhood is a gift of the Holy Spirit that we must say yes to and practice it to be successful at it. I have been privileged to be the proud father of 3 faithful, successful children, and one awesome son-in-law.

Here's how important fathers are. "According to data collected by Promise Keepers and Baptist Press, if a father does not go to church, even if his wife does, only 1 child in 50 will become a regular worshiper. If a father does go regularly, regardless of what the mother does, between two-thirds and three-quarters of their children will attend church as adults."

"Another survey (from the mission field) found that if a child is the first person in a household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5% probability everyone else in the household will follow. If the mother is the first to become a Christian, there is a 17% probability everyone else in the household will follow. However, when the father is first, there is a 93% probability everyone else in the household will follow.

Here's the point of all these statistics: Dad's impact on the kids' FAITH and practice is HUGE."

Now we wouldn't need studies and statistics and authorities to tell us this if we would only follow what God has already instructed us to do in his Word. These studies simply confirm what God has already told us to do.

Deuteronomy 11:19 says, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children,

and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

Yes, dads and granddads are key people in the family, and in the family, we call the church. You just showing up matters. You showing up and encouraging your other family members to join you is vitally important. I noticed as I worshipped with you online during my sabbatical that attendance slipped a bit while I was gone.

Now, how many people here today went to church with your father? Visual proof of what I am speaking of.

What I am trying to do today is encourage fathers and grandfathers and father figures to be in the spirit of Elijah and **“turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers,”**

Our Colossians reading says, **“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.”** This reminds us that within the family there is a mutuality of Love and respect. As Ephesians 5:25 says, **“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,”**

Now I know that many families do not meet the ideal that the Bible lifts up for the family. My mom’s home life is an example of that because without the love and care and faith of my grandma my mom would never have known Jesus. My grandfather on my mom’s side was abusive physically and emotionally, but my mom overcame because of the love of her mother who loved God.

My best friend Rev. Michael Brunk,.. his dad beat him. His stepdad beat him until one day Michael showed up at school bleeding from a beating with an electrical cord. That’s how Michael wound up in the foster care system.

His saving grace was that some of his uncles, and in particular his Grandfather, showed him the grace of God and loved him dearly. Michael’s grandfather lived out the psalmist’s request of God, **“Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.”**

That is what Michael's grandfather did and Michael went on to be a good father, and a pastor who passed on his faith to his children and to many more. Michael never hit his children. He just couldn't, coming from the background of abuse that he did.

In my years as a youth minister, I was a father figure to many. And all I did was try to father the kids, like my father did me. That's why towards the end of my career the kids called me "Father Fred". I know many of you here in this congregation are looked up to by the children who attend. You are their father figure. I very much admire foster parents for so personally picking up the role of father figures.

For those who feel homeless and without a family in this world know that here you are part of the **family of God**. God is your father. Jesus is your brother. We are you brothers and sisters. In the end we will have a "forever home" together in heaven. The great thing about the Family of God is that you can volunteer to be adopted into it. You are already selected by the Holy Spirit, and no judge or papers are needed to belong.

And no, we aren't perfect. We sometimes argue and fight like we were raised in the same biological family, I remember a few fist fights with my brothers. But we fiercely love one another. If you don't feel that way yet, make a decision, make a commitment to love one another more deeply, more completely than before. If someone doesn't seem that loving in return realize they are probably carrying a greater burden than you will ever know.

I want to close with a challenge. It's time for fathers and grandfathers and other males to make a commitment to being role models for the children in your lives. It's time to truly turn your hearts to our children.

They may be 5 or 35 but you are still their father or grandfather or father figure. Claim that gift of the Holy Spirit and live it out in wisdom and faith. Show up to worship and the things of God and recommend that to those who look up to you. Will you do that? Raise your hand!

Let us Pray: God, the fathers and grandfathers and male role models in this congregation have committed to living out the gift you have giving us of being fathers. Empower us to lead by example.

And Lord, for those single moms who struggle to be both mom and dad to their children may their efforts to raise their children in the faith be blessed. In Jesus' name amen.

Next week more on the Church as the Body of Christ. Reach out and recommend to a friend or someone you haven't seen in a while to worship here with us.