

Now Concerning Spiritual Gifts
Exodus 35:30-36:1, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
First Presbyterian Church
January 16, 2022

Exodus

³⁰Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; ³¹he has filled him with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, ³²to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ³³in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. ³⁴And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. ³⁵He has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of artisan or skilled designer. Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the LORD has given skill and understanding to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded.

Intro to the Reading

I hadn't thought about it for a long time. As you know, my entire family – including my grandparents on both sides – were members of the same Baptist church in Atlanta. My parents were baptized and married there – my sisters and I were baptized there – our pastor did my dad's funeral – we WERE Second Ponce de Leon Baptists through and through. Yet, as I was working on my sermon this week, I remembered that late in her life, my grandmother – my dad's mother – started attending a Church of God – the Mt. Paran Church of God to be exact – and sometimes I would go with her. I was probably in my mid-to-late-teens when I had my first experience of what I now know as a Pentecostal and Charismatic church. In other words, a church that believes the spiritual outpouring that occurred on the Day of Pentecost continues to this day... and that to this day, the gifts of the Spirit which Paul refers to in our text – gifts of revelation and the discernment – gifts of prophecy, tongues, and interpretation – and gifts of faith, miracles, and healing – Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians believe that the Holy Spirit continues to manifest its power in these ways... enabling believers to be more effective witnesses to Christ.¹

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore 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. ⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

¹ <https://churchofgod.org/beliefs/church-of-god-is/>

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 discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Sermon

You really can't raise the subject of the Holy Spirit without somebody popping the question, "Well, what about spiritual gifts?" And what often follows that question is a lively and sometimes exasperating discussion that at some point winds around to the always enthusiastic and sometimes shameful, messed up church that was located in ancient Corinth. This is too bad... because too often these discussions lead nowhere constructive. This morning I hope to avoid that pitfall... and offer a word that is not only constructive, but maybe even inspiring.² Some of you may remember Rev. Jack Haberer coming to be our Willard Chair lecturer some years ago. Well, I have been greatly helped this week by Jack's book, *Living the Presence of the Spirit*, and especially his suggestion that rather than focusing only on the church in Corinth, we might look back in Scripture to an earlier bestowal of spiritual gifts in Moses' day. And that's where we meet Bets-uh-layl and O-HO-lee-ab at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses has just received the second edition of the Ten Commandments... and then, he proceeds to then tell the people that God plans to camp among them in a specially designed tent. This tent must be crafted of the finest materials and built according to demanding specifications... and the question on everyone's mind is, "How is this going to happen?" Well, as with any church building program, they begin with a capital campaign... taking up a freewill offering. But the people still wonder, "How will the tent be built?" To which Moses answers... that God's Spirit will fill two average, everyday guys, Bezalel, and Oholiab, and will gift them to do the job. God will fill them with divine spirit... and with the skill and intelligence and knowledge for building God a tent. Well, Jack Haberer suggests that by listening to this and other passages, we can discern at least three things about spiritual gifts.

First, spiritual gifts always bring us closer to God.

Before tapping Bezalel and Oholiab for the job, God had a clear purpose – God wanted to live among the women and men of Israel... to be close to them... present with them... so God gifted these two regular guys to make that possible... And ever since then, all spiritual gifting has one essential goal in mind – bringing God to bear upon people's lives.

Unfortunately, the Corinthian Christians had forgotten this... or just got confused about the purpose. They got so fascinated with speaking in tongues that they turned it into a litmus test for godliness... dividing the church into two classes – the "tongues-speakers" who were considered holier and more favored than the "non-tongues-speakers." Paul responds, somewhat harshly, saying that the only litmus test for true spirituality is love.

² Throughout this sermon I am indebted to Jack Haberer for his very helpful chapter, "Spirit Filled-Spirit Skilled" in his very helpful book, *Living the Presence of the Spirit* (Geneva-2001), p.43-52.

Those who build up the church... those who bring the church together... are the truly spiritual. Those who tear down, and divide are not.

Second, spiritual gifts come in limitless varieties.

Paul writes to the Corinthians that there are a variety of gifts and services and activities which are given by God's Spirit.³ He then offers one of several "gift lists" we find in Scripture. The point is that it's a sample list... not an exhaustive list. Surely the God who created the amazing variety of this world can gift his people with that same variety of ways to extend his grace. Sometimes grace is extended in very dramatic ways – prayers are spoken, and a cancer is healed. Such miracles happened in Jesus' day and still do. But surely miracles also happen in less nature-disrupting ways. When a close Christian friend says something and it is exactly what you need to hear in a difficult moment, is that not the gift of knowledge? When your house floods and your sisters and brothers roll up their pant legs to help you clean up, is that not the gift of service? When you see another person's need and respond generously, is that not the gift of giving?

It's interesting to me that the first gifts ever mentioned, those extended by Bezalel and Oholiab, were gifts of artistic craft and leadership. Folks sometimes make a distinction between "spiritual gifts" and what we might call skills or talents. But the fact is there are many skilled and talented people who use their gifts in graceless ways. But when those talents and those skills are used to give away God's grace, they become spiritual gifts. And though they may not be flashy and draw a big crowd, every extension of God's grace is a miracle, isn't it?

Finally, spiritual gifts are discerned along the way.

I wonder if any of you have ever used one of those diagnostic tools that are designed to help you identify your spiritual gifts? Though these tools are definitely helpful, either THEY get it wrong, or WE get it wrong when we think, "Ok, I'm the wisdom guy... you need wisdom, you come to me!" and "Heather, you've got knowledge covered... you need to know something, just go see Heather!" And "So-and so, you have really strong faith... and so-and -so, you really have such a servant's heart." I don't mean to make light, but I don't think that's what Paul is saying here. Because this is GOD'S Spirit we are talking about, there will be no limit to the ways God may gift us to serve others and build up the church. So friends, keep your eyes open to what God may do through you as you walk along the way... watch for how God might use some experience you have had (especially a hard experience) to help others... and even if it seems to you to require something that you don't think you have... trust God to give you what you need to do whatever it is God is using you to do.

So, let me finish the story of Bezalel and Oholiab. When the plans had been made... and the successful capital campaign was over... and their work was done, these two ordinary guys with very strange names helped Moses assemble and arrange the tent for God. And then, with their work complete, they waited... they waited for God.

³ 1 Corinthians 12:4

And here's what happened: Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.⁴

So, the program was complete... God had gifted some in order to extend grace to all. And whether you believe it or not, so does God gift you. The Living God wants to be present with us and with everyone we touch. And God gifts you to be the conduit of God's love... to be a blessing to others... and to connect him to them. And what a miracle it is when that happens!

⁴ Exodus 40:34-38