

Sermon 17 January 2016
Ps 36:5-10 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 'Gifts Overflowing'

Prayer:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord. Amen.

My lead picture this week is 'Unwrapping God's gifts' because I thought it fitted well with where the sermon journeyed! Of course it is also all about how God's gifts are overflowing and that's all because God loves us... Love is the beginning point of the gifts given, **but we know this!** Know it deep within our beings. Just as we know when love is not the driving force of any gifts we are given; just as we know when the gifts around us are not being applied in love, with love – for the common good of all creation.

We have all just come out from a season of gift giving. And had been on the receiving end of gifts given with love and care and much thought... **and then** there are the 'other's', where we suspect the first thing seen was purchased, shop wrapped / named and almost shop delivered... ... **As adults** we **know** that the gift's we receive stand for much more than the physical reality in our hands. **So it is with God's outpouring of gifts** for us as his beloved children.

Today we are led to start our reflections about good gifts that are poured out for us in the psalm. The wonders of the earth around us and how creation points us to the Creator: the skies to the faithfulness of God; the mighty mountains to the righteousness of God; the deep oceans to the justice of God... *And we have the little note of assurance* from the writer that God **preserves** / keeps forever / saves both humanity and the 'beasts'! **All built** on the solid foundation that we are loved – first. Good, abundant food, *no* more thirst, *no* more darkness, ... all because of the relationship between YHWH-God and his people.

These verses are **so** encouraging and uplifting – mark them well for when those *days of shadow* sneak into your life... because these verses are the second half of the psalm. It is actually a psalm of lament. That means a psalm of crying out in pain and worry to the Lord. The writer starts in the shadows of hate, pain, fear, worry... but **in the Lord** moves to the place of light, praise, goodness and grace that we heard.

Of course we know they did it with faith, and I really am amazed at the power and endurance the people of our 1st Testament because they did / do not have as part of their faith resource's the gift of the Holy Spirit *like we do*. Of course they had the covenantal relationship with God. They were claimed and named, be-loved of YHWH-God and so it is **within** their established relationship we fit **because** of Jesus.

As Jesus followers, believers, disciples we are claimed, named and called beloved and – and this is a distinction Paul makes – and we have poured out for us the gift of the Holy Spirit; who in turn, makes sure we have the gifts of the Spirit overflowing into our lives. For today there are two significant points I'd make: 1 the gift of the Holy Spirit is to ^{*1}activate us for ministry – just as it for Jesus at his baptism, **and** 2. that the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us are for the common good. { 1 the gift of the Holy Spirit is to activate us for ministry – just as it for Jesus at his baptism, and 2. that the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us are for the common good. }

You see I am trying to unpack this piece of Paul's writing about the Holy Spirit, to try and increase our understanding about this huge, but really important topic. Paul lists of *some* of the gifts poured out, it is not complete. Paul is only writing about the ones that were probably causing trouble for the church in Corinth. There are three words I want to use like chapter titles today: Unity, Diversity and Misuse. Unity, Diversity and Misuse, and even here I cannot do justice to the depth and width of Paul's writings.

By 'Unity' I want us to reflect on Paul's teaching that the centre of all this teaching is the relationship we have with God in Jesus by the Holy Spirit. The relationship makes everything else work, and that relationship is overflowing love. The overflowing love of God for all creation, love in human form as

^{*1} <http://modernlectionaries.blogspot.co.nz/2013/01/being-supernaturally-gifted-servant-of.html> ^{*2}Being a Supernaturally Gifted Servant of God (1 Corinthians 12:1-11) By Richard Mario Procida, Esq. ^{*3} w/Loader

Jesus and love in power for us in Holy Spirit. Paul would write by chapter 13 that **love** drives everything and **without love** we are nothing.

In the verses we have today, Paul writes that the unity from which all else emerges is the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We heard him in just 11 verses say: .. same Spirit ... same Lord ... same God ... same Spirit ... same Spirit ... that one Spirit ... one and same Spirit ...!" **One** source of gifts overflowing for us, one source of power activating us in ministry, one purpose which is **for the common good** of all people *and this creation.* cV

One of our difficulties in trying to understand Paul is that we have his letters, but not 'their' letters. We have a one sided conversation! So we have to dig into the background of Paul's letter; his culture and then what he was teaching *because scholars* understand he was writing to the Corinthians because of disunity within the congregation **about** the exercising of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is something that we in St Johns have experienced ourselves **in our past**, we have known difficulties with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how the exercising of these gifts can bring disunity and harm to the people of Jesus.

So Paul found he had to teach on Unity – the source and purpose; diversity of both gift and the receivers and misuse through ignorance, pride, refusal, blocking, etc... The diversity of gifts is almost self-evident, there are as many – more gifts as there are people in this room. Yes they are your naturally born, genetically inherited abilities and yes – God gives more! Accept it, there is something super-natural here.

All our gifts are strengthened and increased as we open ourselves to the giver and as we grow in faith. So yes I do think our gifts shrink, are lost if we fail to use, engage, live in the discipline of faith... Yes in our humanity we rank the gifts – and this is such a major theme in our verses today one sermon can't tackle it- I can only 'mention it'. But in our humanity we rank the gifts and the charisma that can belong, and Paul would be **as furious** with us as he is with the Corinthians. Because ranking the gifts is one of the fastest ways to misuse them and the giver!

In our verses today misuse – any kind means the reason for the giving of gifts is no longer happening, the 'common good' is lost, buried under 'self-serving / personal good' etc. And when this happens Paul says you might as well be cursing Jesus, it adds up to the same thing.

Of course we don't mean to curse Jesus, how shocking, we are all Jesus followers... Our reaction is *surely* just like the Corinthians: how dare Paul say that – who is he to tell me how to use what God has given me... Paul's letter implies the Corinthians defence was along the lines of 'I say 'Jesus is Lord'. Paul's response is that anyone can say a phrase – that's not the point. In our culture we might easily miss what is at stake here because for us it's a bit ho-hum... but in Paul's day it was treason. **Only Caesar was Lord**, and the shadow of crucifixion would fall on the speaker – ***immediately!***

For Paul ^{2*} to say that "Jesus is Lord" is not only to pledge allegiance to **Jesus** rather than to Rome's Caesar, it is also he says, that it means nothing without living it, without **using it** for the common good and that's where the Holy Spirit comes in. Saying it is to accept the super-natural, to experience God's presence, and to allow the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to activate our gifts for the common good.

Paul wants us to know that these spiritual gifts are real. '...there are many spiritual gifts, services and activities; all are from the same Spirit, the same God, and the same Lord. (v. 4-7) That "Lord" is Jesus Christ and it is this claim which distinguishes the Christian from 'just' anybody whether they are 'saying' Jesus is Lord or having a religious ecstatic experience that is not of the Holy Spirit of God. The ^{*3} real sign of the Spirit of God is not the ability to sustain spiritual "highs", but the overflowing of the gifts – the signs of the presence of God as love and compassion in our lives – for the common good. Amen

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