

“What are your gifts?” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
January 20, 2019, Second Sunday after Epiphany
1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Some of you may remember that on December 5, 1960 President Eisenhower was presented with a gift of a white tiger. Actually, the gift was for the people of the USA. The tiger's name was Mohini. When she arrived in the USA, Mohini was one of only seven white tigers in the world and the only one outside of India. Mohini lived in the National Zoo in Washington DC where she was somewhat of a celebrity.

A white tiger, a gift to the people of the United States. One of seven tigers in the world. Rare and very special.

In our reading from First Corinthians, it seems that Paul addresses his comments to those who thought they were rare and very special. Evidently, there were individuals in the Corinthian Church who thought they were better than others because they could speak in tongues. In Paul's day, those who worshipped idols valued speaking in tongues and prophecy. So, this valuing of speaking in tongues may have been a carryover from before the individuals became believers in Christ.

Being ever diplomatic, Paul doesn't call these folks on the carpet and tell them that speaking in tongues is not as valuable as they believe. Paul begins his comments very gently, instructing them: **I do not want you to be uninformed.** From there Paul instructs the Corinthians and us on the gifts of spirit.

Gifts of the spirit are just that, gifts. Mohini was a gift to the American people, but God has given, has gifted, you and me with spiritual gifts, supernatural gifts. Gifts that are much better and more valuable than a white tiger! Again, your spiritual gifts are gifts. The spiritual abilities we have personally are not generated internally by us, but are gifts given to us by God for the **common good** as Paul explains.

I'd like to talk a moment about these two words: common and good. Common good is not a phrase we hear to often today. We live in a society where most folks are concerned with themselves and their good. Common good means that we work together to make things better for everyone involved.

The gifts of the spirit are given by God to build up the church. They are given to strengthen each other's faith and to enable our ministries to prosper. Each of us has been given spiritual gifts, that if used together, in conjunction with others, allow us to be more than the sum of the parts.

Let's use an example. This church has a monthly potluck. People bring their special dishes to the potluck. Jeffrey brings his chicken salad. Mary makes a delicious casserole. I bring BBQ meatballs. Nancy makes deviled eggs. Kevin creates interesting desserts. That's only a small list of what is brought to the potluck. Each of you probably has some favorite dish that another person brings.

Individually are these dishes a meal, the potluck? Would you want to dine only on my BBQ meatballs? I hope not! It is only when everyone contributes and joins together that we have a meal, a delicious meal at that! The sum is greater than the parts.

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Paul identifies nine gifts of the spirit: **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.** What's interesting about this list is that speaking in tongues, the very thing some in the Corinthian church were so proud of, is listed last by Paul. Notice what heads up Paul's list: wisdom and knowledge.

Let's take a moment and briefly explain these nine spiritual gift.

Wisdom – Individuals with this gift have the ability to make wise decisions and to advise others similarly. This wisdom isn't just from trial and error in their own lives but through supernatural understanding from God.

Knowledge – People with this gift have a supernatural, deep understanding of the will and ways of God, personally and through scripture because they love to study, love to learn, and are not content with a surface-level knowledge of topics. These people tend to like footnotes. They can discern truths about spiritual matters in order to teach or direct the church.

Faith – This gift is different than faith unto salvation which all believers enjoy. The gift of faith is the ability to envision what needs to be done and to trust God to accomplish it even though it seems impossible to most people.

Healing – God works through a person with this gift to heal and restore people's bodies, minds, and emotions. These people see healing as a sign that God uses to reveal his power to people so that many will come to believe in Jesus. People with this gift do not see someone healed every time they ask God, since healing is something that God alone decides to do.

Miracles – The gift of miracles is the ability to call on God to do supernatural acts that reveal his power. People with the gift of miracles see God show up in extraordinary ways, from daily little events to major public displays.

Prophecy – Believers with the gift of prophecy don't necessarily tell the future as much as they build up, encourage, and redirect the church body. They help the church understand the heart and desires of God and urge the church to wholeheartedly pursue God and holiness.

Discernment – This gift is also referred to "distinguishing between spirits." People with this gift have the ability to discern whether a situation, person, or event is good or evil, right or wrong, heavenly or demonic.

Speaking in Tongues – A person with this gift will supernaturally speak in an unknown language. If this gift is used in a corporate setting, the message in tongues must be interpreted.

Interpreting Tongues – A person with the gift of interpreting tongues has a supernatural ability to understand and explain to others the message given in tongues.

Did you notice that most of the descriptions used the word supernatural? The power behind the spiritual gift comes from God as Paul so plainly states: **All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.**

There are other gifts of the spirit mentioned in other places in the Bible, such as teaching, administration, hospitality, leadership, evangelism, and the gift of giving financial resources.

What gifts do you have? I've copied a simple spiritual gifts test for you to take. The test will assist you in identifying the gifts you have. You may discover gifts you didn't even know you had. Please take a moment this week to take the test. There are many tests on the web that are more detailed. Please share your test results with me. I'd be interested in how you can use your spiritual gifts to serve in this church.

At the beginning of this sermon I mentioned Mohini, the white tiger. There's more to her story. When Mohini was moved to the National Zoo, she was put in a 12 x 12-foot cage until a new enclosure could be built. In that cage, Mohini continually paced back and forth. The new enclosure being built would simulate Mohini's natural habitat as closely as possible. It would have many acres of lush forest with rolling hills and a large pond. It would be a playground for Mohini to stretch and express her natural self as one of nature's most splendid and powerful creatures.

When the new enclosure was completed, Mohini was freed from her cramped 12 x 12 cage to roam and run in her new habitat. Much to everyone's surprise, Mohini immediately moved to the perimeter of the enclosure and stayed in a tiny corner of the large enclosure. She started to pace back and forth in this corner in an imaginary 12 x 12-foot cage oblivious to the freedom she had. Unbelievably, Mohini stayed in this corner of her cage until she died at age 20.

I tell you this story because I want each of you to take advantage of the gifts you have and to explore to see if you have more. Christ came so that we may have life and have it abundantly. Please don't live in your 12 x 12-foot cage. Don't think you haven't been given gifts of the spirit. We all have. And for those of you who know one or two of your gifts, don't be limited by what you think are your gifts, get out and try new things, make mistakes, listen to what other people say you do well. God has given you gifts to serve. Take advantage of God's generosity!

God has given all of us spiritual gifts, not for our own edification, but for the common good. Let's all work together to using our gifts to build up the Body of Christ. Amen? Amen!