# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Diversity of the Spirit’s Gifts”**

**Ephesians 4:7-13**

 **October 24, 2021**

Last Sunday we spoke of our unity as the family of faith here at Congregational-Presbyterian church. We learned from God’s Word that our unity is not a result of our efforts but is a gift of God given to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. Further, we defined stewardship as taking good care of God’s gifts, in particular God’s gift of unity. We can never take our unity for granted but, with the help of the Spirit living in each one of us, we remain committed to one another.

In our passage today, the Apostle Paul moves from the unity of the church to the diversity of gifts that God has given to the members of the church. If the first task of the stewardship of our church is to take good care of our unity, the second task is to take good care to exercise the gifts that each one of us have been given for the sake of the ministry of the church. I invite you to turn with me to Ephesians 4:7-13

However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. That is why the Scriptures say, “When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people.”Notice that it says “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself. Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

“However,” Paul says as he begins this new paragraph. We are united through the Spirit; however, we are also diverse through the Spirit. Unity in the church does not mean uniformity. I have a gift - you have a gift – and chances are that our gifts are not the same. It doesn’t make any difference whether you are young in the Lord or have been a Christian most of your life; God’s Word declares that you have been given a gift. Your gift may lie dormant in you, not yet put to use, but it is there. So, what you and I must do is discover what our gift is and how God wants us to use that gift in the church.

The Bible makes it clear that there are many different gifts. Here in Ephesians we have five of them listed. Elsewhere in places like Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4, all passages that were contained in last week’s Bible Reading Plan, many other gifts are listed. When we bring the various lists together, we can see that a spiritual gift is a particular spiritual ability given to an individual that, when used under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, builds up the life of the congregation and enables it to continue the ministry of Jesus in the world.

How, then, do we discover the gift Jesus has given us by the Spirit? We do so in a way that is similar to how we discovered our natural talents. Those of us who have athletic talent – or, we used to have athletic talent – discovered our talent by noticing those things about ourselves that relate to athletic pursuits. We came to realize that we were faster than the average person, or better coordinated. We joined a particular sport and not only enjoyed it but became rather good at it. We even had others tell us that they saw athletic talent in us. Or, we could speak of musical ability, or being good with numbers, or any other ability in which we have shown ourselves adept during our lifetime. We discovered that ability, that natural gift, if you will, by engaging it during the normal course of life. At the same time, we have discovered that there are many other things in life that we are not particularly talented in. We may enjoy engaging in them, but we recognize that there are others who are much better at them than we are – they have a natural talent in an area where we are lacking.

So it is with spiritual gifts which are discovered as we live the spiritual life. It is often the case that we are attracted to a particular gift when we observe a fellow believer exercise the gift. You hear the witness of a missionary and you think about becoming one yourself. A pastor has had a positive influence in your life and you wonder whether you would be a good pastor. You see someone exercising mercy or hospitality or generosity, and you find yourself thinking that this might be your area of giftedness. Having been attracted, you look into it and begin to try it out. You soon discover that for some things you don’t seem to have a gift. With others, you say to yourself, “This is going well. Perhaps God is calling me to this.” Guided by the Spirit and the input of godly people in your life, your gift is slowly revealed and you begin its exercise.

In my own life, I discovered at an early age that I liked reading the Bible and talking with others about its meaning. In my high school youth group I enjoyed the varied activities, but my favorite thing was our Sunday evening Bible Study led by our youth pastor. I still remember our year-long study of Romans. In college I was involved in a Christian ministry where I had the opportunity to lead others in Bible Study, and then God led me to volunteer as a youth leader in my church where I led small group conversations about the Bible and was even asked to give talks in front of the larger group. After working in youth ministry for 12 years I was called to be a pastor, and I attended Seminary where I was able to devote three years to theological study. Can you guess what my favorite classes were? Old and New Testament studies. Since becoming a pastor, I have had the opportunity to earn a doctorate, and my doctoral thesis was on spiritual formation through the daily reading of the Bible. God gave me a gift related to his Word and called me to use that gift for the building up of the church and its ministry.

Our unity as a congregation is a gift of God, and to be good stewards we must take good care of our unity. Our diversity as a congregation is also a gift of God, and to be good stewards we must take good care of our spiritual gifts. We do so by being people who believe we have been given a gift, who actively seek to discover that gift, and who look for ways to put it into practice. When we do so, God is glorified and the work of Jesus Christ continues in our congregation and through our congregation into the world.