

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, June 15, 2008, Liturgical Year "A"

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scriptures: 1 Cor. 12:1-14; Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:11-16

***"Using Your Spiritual Gifts" (part 1)***

**THE CHURCH BUILT ON A ROCK**

During the last two Sundays we looked at the characteristics of a Church built on the Rock. Recall Jesus' words after Peter confessed him as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Jesus said, ***"Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven and what you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."***

We saw how a church built on the rock must have 1) the solid foundation of Jesus Christ as Lord, 2) must consist of believers who have a saving faith, 3) will have a special fellowship, 4) has sure future, and 5) has a sacred function. Jesus said to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Keys represent authority and responsibility. We have the authority and responsibility to preach the Gospel, make disciples and teach the world to obey all that Jesus commanded. In other words, the sacred function of the church is to do the mission of the Church as set forth in **Mt. 28:18-20**.

Now one of the ways we as individuals participate in this mission is to engage in the work of ministry within the local church. And if we are going to be effective in doing the work of ministry, we also need to understand the role spiritual gifts play in the process.

Dr. John MacArthur is a well known radio bible teacher and pastor of Grace Community Church in Panorama City, California. His church has continued to grow and now has an average weekend attendance of 9000. And it is no surprise that it is structured around spiritual gifts. Pastor MacArthur says, *"No local congregation will be what it should be, what Jesus prayed that it would be, what the Holy Spirit gifted it and empowered it to be unless it understands spiritual gifts."*

Last week everyone was given a spiritual gifts questionnaire to help discern what gifts you may have. Now in all fairness, we need to spend a little more time in God's Word to find out more about spiritual gifts, **For there are some important questions to answer – 1) Who receives the spiritual gifts? 2) What are the spiritual gifts? 3) What is their purpose? 4) How do you receive them? 5) How do you know which ones you have and 6) How do we use them?**

Now there are three primary passages in the New Testament that deal in detail with the spiritual gifts. We are going to look at these this week and then in part 2, two weeks from now to find the answers to our questions.

**WHO RECEIVES THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?**

So who receives the spiritual gifts? The answer is every member of the body of Christ, every member of the Church. That means if you have put your faith in Jesus and accepted Him as your Lord and Savior, you have been given certain spiritual gifts.

Please turn with me to our first passage – **I Cor. 12:1-14:**

***"Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. <sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. <sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. <sup>12</sup> For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body is not one member, but many.***

NOTE\*\*\*The gifts in this passage are sometimes referred to as the ***ninefold manifestation*** for the gifts involve visible demonstrations of God's supernatural power working through a person.

If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, you have the Holy Spirit! And if you have the Holy Spirit, you have been given gifts by the Holy Spirit. Now look at another passage written by St. Paul that deals again with spiritual gifts:

**Romans 12:4-8:**

***<sup>4</sup> For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup> And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.***

What is St. Paul telling us in these two passages? We are individually members of the one body of Christ and each member has been given different gifts with different functions.

**GIFTS OF GRACE – WHAT ARE THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?**

So what is a spiritual gift? Well, let's first look at what spiritual gifts are not. First, gifts are not talents. Talents are naturally given – you are born with a talent. However, spiritual gifts are spiritually given. Second, spiritual gifts are not skills. A skill is something we learn, a gift is something we are given. Now the Holy Spirit can use our natural talents and abilities to God's glory and the gifts can be used in conjunction with our talents but they are different.

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God may use a spiritual gift to build on the natural talent or skill like teaching or singing. A man of vision may be given the gift of faith. But one might have the gift of preaching without a natural speaking ability. So spiritual gifts are distinct from talents and skills.

Third, the spiritual gifts are not ministries. We use spiritual gifts to minister and thus, ministries are outlets for our gifts, but they are not the gift itself.

Finally, the gifts are not fruit. Recall **Galatians 5:22-23** where Paul lists the fruit of the spirit – *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”* Fruit comes from within and the fruit reflects the character of one’s heart. Unlike the gifts of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit are not a means to an end, they are the end.

While all gifts are not possessed by every believer, every variety of fruit should be in every believer. Gifts will cease but not the fruit. In fact, the possession of gifts does not indicate godliness of life. They don’t make us more holy. The Corinthian Church had the gifts but were divided and full of pride. That is why Paul positioned his love chapter (I Cor. 13) right in the middle of his two chapters (I Cor. 12 and 14) discussing the gifts.

So if we have looked at what gifts are not, what are they? *They are Holy Spirit given abilities for Christian service.*

### **IT’S ALL ABOUT GROWTH – THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

Now what is the purpose of the spiritual gifts? Certainly they demonstrate God’s power working in and through us and they are meant for Christian service and ministry. But what do they accomplish? It can be summed up in one word – GROWTH.

Jesus, on the night before He died, said these powerful words, ***“I am the vine you are the branches, if you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”*** (Jn. 15:5).

If Jesus is the foundation He is also the vine. And a vine provides all that the branches need and if the branches are in the vine they will bear fruit and that means they will continue to bear more fruit. So what is happening? There is always growth going on – whether it is in the quality of the fruit or the quantity of the fruit. That means we should be growing in spiritual maturity as individual members and as a corporate body and we should be adding to our numbers. Simply put, a church that is not growing is a church that is backsliding.

Our passage from **Ephesians 4:11-16** identifies the purpose of the spiritual gifts in more detail:

***<sup>11</sup> And He (Jesus) gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. <sup>14</sup> As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every***

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***wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup> but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.***

The five gifts mentioned in the above are referred to as the leadership gifts. The Lord gives these gifts so that the leaders of the Church can equip the saints (members of the Church) for the work of service for the building up of the body of Christ – in other words for growth both spiritually and numerically! Note above that the verb grow is used two more times in this passage.

So we use the spiritual gifts as a means to grow in our walks with the Lord and so that others come to know the Lord and in turn grow in their walks with Jesus. That is the purpose of the spiritual gifts. And it is why Paul says in **I Cor. 13** that the gifts will eventually end. For in heaven there will be no need for the spiritual gifts as we will be made complete in Christ when we see Him as He is. But until then, we are to seek after the spiritual gifts and use them to God's glory. And we do so in the context of our local church.

Let us pray.....