

I love the season of Christmas within the church because of the intense focus and purpose of our worship. We celebrate and are called to proclaim the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, the Word incarnate; the greatest gift any of us can receive. Through his birth; God put into motion HIS saving mission because through the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus we receive forgiveness and salvation and the promise of eternal life.

At Christmas, we have a tendency to share gifts with one another. I ask you to think about the gifts you received from your family and friends this year.

What was your favorite gift? What was your most useful gift?

For myself, my favorite was an old rubber tractor from the 50's that Pastor Heidi got me and then completely forgot about; not only where she had hidden it but that she had even purchased it. By the way, I got it last Monday wrapped in a brown paper bag.

I was able to get my most useful gift by pooling the money I received from my parents and Heidi's grandma; it is for the garage, a heater that runs on a propane grill tank. On one of the coldest mornings I turned it on and went to AutoZone to get some parts. The trip took a little longer than I planned and by the time I got home it was almost 90 degrees in the garage and I was very tempted to open the door to cool the place off; I at least knew that I would be warm when working on the cars.

Whenever we get gifts, there are always the ones we really like and others that we find to be very useful. For instance with the two that I mentioned, the rubber tractor is not very useful because it just sits on a shelf, but the memory of how and when it was added to my collection will stick with me for a long time. The heater for the garage will, I hope, be very useful for years to come when I want to work on a car and it is as cold outside as it was a couple weeks ago.

We receive gifts from a variety of sources, but especially from God. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul is teaching about the gifts of the Spirit, the gifts that come from God's Spirit to those who believe. The main point that Paul is trying to get across is that there are many gifts, services and activities that God gives us through the Holy Spirit. Paul goes on to teach the people that these gifts are given for the common good.

The gifts that we received are given for the common good of all. God intended for us to use the gifts that we have received by sharing them with others. That means that those who are blessed with musical abilities can share them with others and it doesn't matter if it is in worship, at home or at a concert.

Those who have the gift of teaching can share their gift by helping others to learn. Those who have the gift of visiting can share that gift by visiting those who are lonely or suffering in some way. Every gift that we received from God can be shared in one way or another.

Personally, I have been helped many times because people shared their gifts and abilities with me and I strive to do the same. As we reach out to others with what God has done for us and given us, we share the hope and love that is in God. Isn't that what being a Christian is all about?

We come together as the body of Christ to minister to those in need. There are a lot of people who are suffering. People are grieving the deaths of their loved ones. There are those who have been devastated by the tremendous earthquake in Haiti with thousands of people dead and still missing. There are people who are suffering from poverty, illness, addictions, and loneliness here in our own city, state and nation.

All who suffer are in need of being touched by God. Each one of us sitting here today is in need of being touched by God. It is God who touches through the gifts and activities of the Spirit. That is the only reason we are able to in our turn reach out and give people hope.

As you think about your gifts of the Spirit, and yes you do have gifts, I invite you to take a Gift of the Spirit inventory which Mindy has for each of us. When prayerfully done it will take about 20 to 30 minutes to complete. If we run out, we can print more and they will be available next week. As you take your survey, be honest about your answers and then when you have finished, I pray that it will offer some guidance as to where your spiritual gifts are focused and where together we can work toward strengthening the ministry of God in Christ Jesus through them.

Amen.