

Pastor T.C. Arnold
7th Sunday of Easter
1 Peter 4:10, 11
June 1st, 2014

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied gifts.

We all know someone who is more talented, or who has more skills and abilities than we do. For example, Benjamin Franklin was an author, politician, scientist, printer, even a postmaster. Martin Luther was a theologian, linguist, and a hymn writer. Red Skelton was a comedian and an excellent painter. It seems as if some people have many talents, and we only have a few.

The Bible tells us that every single person has been given talents, abilities, and gifts. God in His grace and in His wisdom has given each one of us certain talents and gifts. He only gives us the ones that we can use the best and accomplish the most. He doesn't overload us, nor does He overlook us. He gives us the talents and gifts that can best accomplish His purpose through us. The talents that He gave us are unique in each one of us because of our personality and our character. We are all uniquely gifted. To one person God gives many talents – to another He may give but a few. St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 4:7, "*What do you have that you did not receive from God?*"

The Epistle text appointed for today could be used for our Stewardship Sunday in the fall. But any time – like today – is a good day to talk about the varied and beneficial gifts God has given to us – lest we forget that every good and perfect gift is from above.

For example, a group of women in a church were discussing ways in which they could serve in the church. Some were teaching Sunday school, some were singing in the choir, and two of them played the piano. A woman named Charlotte said that there wasn't much that she could do except knit and crochet and do needlework. Well, that started something. We'll come back to that later.

We each have different talents and gifts and abilities. What are the abilities that you have? The talents? The gifts? The skills? Are you using them? Do you have an unused ability? Whatever we have God tells us to use what we have got. Now, our God-given gifts are not just for serving ourselves. They are not given to us just so that we can make more money or get ahead or be more successful. They are not given to us so that we can be more desirable.

So there is a choice involved. Do we want to be self-centered with our gifts or Christ-centered with our gifts? St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "*It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*" Jesus said in Luke 12, "*From everyone who has been given much, much more will be demanded. From one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*"

When we look at our own God-given gifts we often approach the use of them in the same way that Moses did. He had lots of excuses for not using the gifts that had been given to him. "Who am I? I'm a nobody." You want me to lead the Israelites out of Egypt? I can't lead. I could never do that. I can't talk in front of a group of people. I don't have the experience. They won't believe me when I talk to them. Ask somebody else Lord." Do any of these sound familiar to you? In spite of all his excuses, God had plans for Moses. He turned Moses' "No" into a "yes". God used him mightily to accomplish His purpose. And He has plans to use you mightily – if you will let Him. He gives these blessings for a reason – so we can be equipped to serve Him and His people.

Earlier I mentioned Charlotte who said she couldn't do much except knit and crochet and do needlework. When she said that almost everyone who heard it said they wanted to learn to do what she was able to do. A few weeks later a class was scheduled at the church and 16 ladies showed up for the class. They learned and practiced until they could all make something. They were all happy, and Charlotte realized that God did give her talents to share for the good of God's people.

But that's not the end of the story. Nancy, who learned from Charlotte, taught others how to do the same thing. One is using her skills to knit mittens for needy school children. Another makes bedroom slippers for elderly patients in a nursing home. All of this happened because one woman was willing to

share a God-given talent that she thought didn't count for anything. Watch God's given talents multiply through you.

Scripture is full of these kinds of stories – stories of God using ordinary people for extraordinary things. We already talked about Moses and what he did to lead the people of God out of Egypt. Peter seemed to have a pretty hot tempter and was very impulsive; yet, God used his great faith to build the Church. Thomas doubted Jesus, but he learned to follow with commitment and dedication. Paul, who resented Christians and was determined to destroy them, became the first great missionary of the Christian Church. Take any of the disciples in the New Testament and the same can be said – ordinary people extraordinary things. That's us. That's you and me – working for His Kingdom.

When you think that you are unimportant and that your gifts are really insignificant, then it's time for you to hear the Gospel again – the Good News of just how much God thinks about you and how much He cares for you. He considered you so important that He laid down His very life for you. He redeemed you from the power of sin with His own precious blood. He will love you forever. One day He will come back to take you home with Him forever.

Question: What interests and skills and abilities has God given you to use or develop in your role as a member of the body of Christ here in this congregation? Do you have the gift of hospitality? Are you good at visiting new people or shut-ins? Perhaps you are good at plumbing, electrical work, painting, ushering, praying and helping. Maybe you are good at listening, organizing, teaching singing, and writing. Perhaps you have good office skills and enjoy doing computer work or administration. Peter reminds us in the text that God will provide the strength for us to serve.

Jesus gave us a perfect example of serving. He came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life for a ransom payment of all our sins. He wasn't interested in getting credit or in getting ahead. He wasn't even thinking of what it would cost Him. He gave His life for His enemies and for His friends. He gave Himself for the sins of every man, woman, and child of the past, present, and future.

The concept of serving doesn't come naturally. Our inborn desire is to serve ourselves and to take care of our own needs first and foremost. Sometimes we don't even get around to thinking about other people at all. Serving is contrary to what our society promotes for the most part as well. Recognition, achievement, success, power and control. In servant-hood there is no glory, no spotlight, and no fame.

But as we hear the Word of God in worship, in Bible class, and in our devotions, we are encouraged and strengthened. As we receive the body and blood of Christ Jesus in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we are strengthened and empowered for serving. In His promise, He gives us strength and power to be fruitful stewards.

Ian and Shea have started the road of living and working in the body of Christ today for their child on this day. At that font of Holy Baptism Jesus calls Simon His own and engrafts him into His kingdom. This gift that began with water and the Word will be lived out each day in his faith. We are like trees planted next to streams of water. When truly connected to Christ, we produce fruit. Whatever we do prospers because we do it to the glory of God and He uses and blesses all of our efforts.

Use all of the talents that you've got, whether two or half a dozen or more. You will be a blessing to God, to the Church, to the community, and to your family. God loves you with all that He has. We know how much He loves us. Everything that we have to give – the talents that we have – are from Him. The life that we have is from Him too – that's eternal life that He won for us on the cross. So in response to what God gave us first – that is life – serve Him and one another with your talents and with all that you have. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.