

You Are Gifted
I Corinthians 12:4-11
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Have you ever struggled to take a compliment?

Recently Jim and I were in a conversation with another couple. Throughout the conversation we were talking about the differences between people and how those impact our relationships. A lot of the conversation was about how we come to things from unique experiences and perspectives, and because of that sometimes what one person thinks is helpful is experienced differently by the other.

Somewhere in that conversation one of our friends brought up the idea of love languages - you might be familiar with the book *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. The idea is that each of us has a way that we show love that is most natural to us and that sometimes this can be challenging in relationships if we don't understand what our native love language and that of others in our life is.

So, our friend said to her spouse, "For instance, you show love by doing things for people. But I like to speak my love with kind and affirming words." She went on to say, "And sometimes that is hard because you don't take compliments very well."

I don't think our friend is alone in that. Even when we believe we are good at something...even when deep down inside we long to be noticed or affirmed...most of us don't take compliments that well. Many of us have never learned how to take them. We have been raised to be humble and not to draw attention to ourselves, so we find ourselves uncomfortable when positive things are said.

And, because we live inside our own minds and bodies, we know everything about ourselves that we would call "less than" and the reality is that those voices are often louder than the ones that affirm us. Friends, it's okay to admit that if we're honest, most of us aren't really comfortable with what we're practicing this year during Lent - with this idea of looking at ourselves in the mirror and saying words of affirmation.

But this tendency to downplay our own strengths can get in the way of recognizing and using the gifts that we have been given.

Because, did you hear the scripture? We all have gifts.

This passage from I Corinthians begins, "Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (I Corinthians 12:4-7, NRSVUE).

Paul then goes on writing, "To one there is given..." and he goes through a list of various kinds of gifts.

While he happens to name things like prophecy and healing, speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues, what is less important is the exact items on the list and what is more important is the recognition that everyone has gifts.

You have gifts. You have gifts. You have gifts.

What if I asked you what your gifts are? How would you answer? How confidently would you answer?

See we often get caught up in the details. We ask questions like:

- Is a gift different from a talent?
- Is something considered a gift simply because I am good at it?
- Are there a limited number of things that are considered gifts? Do only things like healing and prophecy and tongues count? Are hospitality and serving also gifts? (And, by the way, this list in I Corinthians is not exhaustive...there are other lists in the New Testament as well)

But sometimes we get so caught up in these conversations that we lose energy for actually discerning our gifts.

And some of you may be wondering why it even matters. Some of you might be content to just go through your days doing what needs to be done, completing the tasks in front of you, responding to whatever comes up. And, those are good things to do.

But, still there is benefit to spending some time noticing and naming our own gifts.

Because, we do ourselves a disservice when we don't claim our gifts. After all, then we don't see the fullness of who God created us to be and when that is true, then we don't honor God's creation.

What if we embraced the idea that naming and claiming our gifts wasn't about drawing attention to ourselves or showing off how good we are, but instead about honoring what - or in this case, who - God has created?

What if we understood that to identify our gifts is to celebrate God and God's creative spirit?

But still we might wonder how we figure this all out.

Perhaps it will take a good, long look in the mirror...some quiet contemplation...some affirming self talk.

Perhaps it will take the community around us, for often others see our gifts long before we do.

I believe it was the summer between my junior and senior years in high school. I was at church camp and that week there were adult leaders who pulled me aside and told me the gifts they saw in me. I remember a conversation that happened after one group activity. This was a simulation exercise, perhaps you have done one like it. The group was given a tragic situation and told that only four of the eight people in the story can survive. Then, based on descriptions of the characters, together you have to decide which people it should be. The point of the exercise is multifold. It gives the group a chance to think through questions like: is a person's physical strength more valuable than their caring heart? But, and perhaps more importantly, it gives the group the chance to learn how to listen to perspectives that are different from their own, how to talk about what we value, and how to make decisions together even when that sometimes means choosing to let go of what you want.

So, we were working our way through this exercise and after we were done, one of the adult leaders who was part of my group took me aside and identified my gift of leadership. He then went on to talk about the ways he could see Christian vocation in my future.

Would I be your pastor if that conversation had not happened? Perhaps. But I feel confident that my ability to identify my call was deeply connected with the willingness of others to help me see my gifts.

So, maybe an important part of this journey is paying attention to each other...listening to each other...speaking words of encouragement to one another...naming another's giftedness until they themselves can claim it.

Because, again, our gifts matter. They matter because they are part of our amazing creation and one of the best ways we can honor God is to honor the fullness of all creation, including ourselves. And they matter because our gifts are intended for the good of the whole.

Friends, you are gifted. Your gifts may not be the same as mine nor mine the same as yours. But each of us is gifted and our gifts matter, not only to ourselves, but to the world.

So, remember this. And, if you have been participating along with us during this season of Lent, post these words on your mirror: "I am gifted."

Yes, YOU are gifted. Name it, claim it, live it fully. You are gifted and you are a gift to the world. Amen.