

Gifted: You Have Life-Giving Gifts!

A sermon based on 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 – ***“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.***

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You’ve seen it before. A touching song playing softly in the background from an artist like Sarah McLachlan. It fits right in with what you’re seeing on the screen, as a series of moving clips fills your TV for that brief minute or two, each one of a dog looking lonely, cast out...or a little child in a third world country, tiny gut sticking out but everywhere else almost bare bones, tears starting to form in their eyes as tears are starting to form in your eyes...or the child with the cleft lip or some other deformity, those pictures tugging at your heart. You’ve seen those commercials, right?

And sometimes – maybe sometimes – your heart goes out to them because, “If I don’t do something, they might die. The dog will be put down. That child in the third world country may starve. What can I do?” And then, of course, you hear and see the solution....for just \$0.50 a day you can feed them for the entire month...\$20 a month will give them a new smile...giving a dollar a day will save a life.

I’m sure you’ve seen those commercials. Have you ever been moved so much to give in order to save a life?

What is it that moves you to give? What motivates you to act?

You see, for this entire season of Epiphany, we conducted a thorough examination of your spiritual gifts...what they are, how you’ve gotten them, how can you use them. But what we haven’t touched on a lot is the why. Why would you use them? Why do you use them? What motivates you?

Well, in almost a very backwards way, Paul, in our verses this morning, gives us our motivation. His conclusion is, ***“If Christ had not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”***

But, to get to that conclusion, let’s follow his train of thought. If Jesus did not rise from the dead: 1) Any gospel preaching is useless, 2) The Christian faith is in vain, as guarantee of our faith, Easter, was only a fanciful tale, and Paul’s vision of the living Christ who appeared to him on the road to Damascus was only a hallucination. Going further, then 3) We haven’t been justified (declared not guilty of our sins), meaning 4) Our sins haven’t been declared forgiven, meaning 5) We’re still in our sins. And you know, remaining in our sins – controlled by the sinful nature and on the sure path to hell – we would have

absolutely no desire to use our spiritual gifts. We would have absolutely no desire to do anything God-pleasing.

“But, Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.” Jesus lives again. We know that. We believe that. And it’s his life that forgives us and our sins, gives purpose and validity to our Christian faith, and makes our sharing the gospel worthwhile. Jesus’ resurrection to life is what gives us eternal life and now moves and motivates us to love him, to live for him, to work for him.

Or, at least, it should. Does it?

Now, obviously, we wouldn’t say there’s no resurrection from the dead, like Paul was alluding to at the beginning of our verses. We know there will be another resurrection in our future. So, then, the question is, do we live with an eye towards that final resurrection? Do we live in light of Jesus’ resurrection, striving to get to heaven (knowing what it’s taken to get us there, wanting to be righteous as Jesus has made us to be)? Do we live as though we’re already citizens of heaven (which, again, would be wanting to be righteous as Jesus has made us to be)?

What would that look like? Well, I guess we could just review the themes of the last six weeks...

You have God-given gifts, gifts given/gifted to you by God in his love in order to use for his purpose...to build up his family here, to dispense his love in doing so, to ultimately bring glory to Jesus. Are you doing that?

You have complementary gifts, unique gifts as different parts of the body of Christ, every one of us bringing something different – yet still important – to the table. Are you finding ways to use your specific gifts, or aren’t you bringing anything to the table of the body of Christ here?

You have the unusual, exceptional, extraordinary gift of love, which ought to impact your whole attitudes in using your spiritual gifts and ought to infuse your spiritual gifts as a whole. Would you say it’s love at the heart of the use of your spiritual gifts or selfishness, pride, guilt?

You have edifying gifts, which means you have opportunities to practice spiritual maturity in how you use your gifts and how you help others to become more spiritually mature in the way they use their gifts. Are you working to get on the same page with everyone else here when it comes to that?

And now, today, you have life-giving gifts. You have the opportunity to use your gifts to give life to others as you share the life-giving message of the Christ’s resurrection with them. When’s the last time you took hold of one of those awesome opportunities?

As you can see....as you’ve seen throughout these weeks, using your spiritual gifts is not some easy task, where you can give minimal effort and call it a day. It takes focus. It takes work. It’s intentional. It shows the new life of faith Christ has given us, which should be coursing through our very lives.

Is it there for you?

I can’t help but think back to what a section of James 2 says, **“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”**

Isn't that what it comes down to? If using my spiritual gifts is a reflection of an alive and vibrant faith in Jesus, then what does not using them show?

I hope, I pray none of you would look at your spiritual gift usage and conclude, "My faith is dead." But I'm guessing you would be where I am when I look at the usage of mine, "My faith life is unhealthy," or, "My faith life, at times, is stuck," or even, "My faith life is not as vibrant as God wants it to be."

And that's a problem. It's a sinful problem.

Thankfully, Paul has revealed the solution: "***Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.***"

We know that. It's a fact. Christ was raised historically on the third day. Paul uses this same verb form in the original language that expresses the certainty of Christ's bodily resurrection...he uses that specific word a total of seven times in this passage in this section. That Jesus lives again is 100% sure.

But more important than the historicity and the authenticity of Jesus' resurrection is what this means for you and me today...spiritually and eternally. Again, because we have a less than perfectly healthy faith in Jesus, and, again, because we are less than perfect in how we have/haven't used our spiritual gifts, God sent Jesus in time.

And what did Jesus do? He lived. He died. He rose.

If you want an example of perfection, including perfect use of spiritual gifts....look at Jesus. As we've seen over the weeks, everything he did gave glory to God, everything he did was out of love, everything he did was selfless and for you, everything he did was so to build you up as part of God's eternal family. That was his life – perfection.

And his death was no less amazing – taking all of our sins and our failures that should have and were preventing our entrance into heaven, on the cross Jesus took those all away, leaving us with his perfection.

And finally his resurrection - his certain resurrection – that's the life-giving gift. Through his resurrection, Jesus has given you the gift of life eternal, assuring you that you will live with him in heaven forever in perfection.

Understand Jesus gave his life – and took it up again – so you could have perfection. Jesus gave his life – and took it up again - every single gift you have right now...spiritual gifts, physical gifts, all of it...Jesus gave his life and took it up again, so that could be yours.

That good news is what breathes life, not only in you, not only in your heart. The gospel of Jesus – his life, death, and certain resurrection, is what breathes life in this congregation. It's what can make this family of God here so vibrant.

Which means the way you and I use our gifts from here on out – starting today - is going to be different, as it gets to reflect a vibrant, living faith in Jesus...a faith which desires to and is continually being fed by the good news of the gospel, a faith which is focused on the resurrection of Jesus, being moved and motivated by it, and a faith determined to share that motivating message of the resurrection with others...a life-giving gift.

Do you ever pay attention to the Geico commercials you see on TV or hear over the radio? Most of them are rather odd. Anyways, there was one I heard recently entitled, "Eyewitnesses Interviews with Inanimate Objects." On the scene of a recent windstorm, they interviewed a chest of drawers. It described the howling storm, which raged outside while it stayed inside and watched a romantic comedy. And the punchline? A tree branch smashed through the window, the reporter asked if the chest of drawers was hurt, and the response? "Eh, I just got a scratch on my chest."

A chest of drawers can't help you in the middle of a dangerous storm. It's an inanimate and lifeless object. You, however, are not lifeless. You can help others in the middle of this life's dangerous storms. How will we do that?

Well, first, remember Jesus gave his life for you so that you would be given life eternal. Life has been given to you so that you can live for him. Life has been given to you so that we can give life to others. And, spiritually alive, the way you use your gifts can help someone else come alive spiritually.

Like when you strive to practice spiritual maturity inside and outside of the church. Or when you use complementary gifts, working together as the body of Christ here, unlike other congregations, where people seem so focused on themselves. But you're not like that...Christ's resurrection makes you different.

Just simply being loving to others reveals the vibrant and living faith coursing through your body. And, being committed to being the church means focused on what Christ wants from his church – to be full of gospel people (people committed to living according to the gospel, people committed to sharing the gospel, that life-giving message).

You can do that. You can give it your all when it comes to your spiritual gifts. You know why? Listen to the last thing Paul tells us about Jesus' resurrection, "***Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***" Christ is the firstfruits...remember what that means? We've talked about it before, but as a refresher, the firstfruits was the first sheaf of the harvest which was given to the Lord as a token that all the harvest belonged to the Lord and would be dedicated to him through dedicated lives. So Christ, who has been raised, is the guarantee of the resurrection of all of God's redeemed people.

Christ is the firstfruits for us, God's best gift, God's guarantee of eternity for you and me. God gave his best in Jesus. Now we can do the same with our spiritual gifts!

How can you save a life? Some commercials will tell you it's simple, just a little bit of money. And sometimes, that's enough to move you.

This is even better! Souls out there who need even greater saving, and you have the greatest gift. You have life eternal because of Christ crucified and risen. God use that to move you to simply use your life-giving spiritual gifts...to live for Jesus...to share life in Jesus. Amen.

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