

November 24, 2013

Who Do You Think You Are? I Am Gifted

Biblical Text: Romans 12:1-8

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On the Church's calendar, today is the 27th Sunday after Pentecost, the 13th Sunday in Kingdomtide, or Christ the King Sunday. But on our cultural calendar, it is **Thanksgiving Sunday**, the Sunday prior to Thanksgiving Day.

Thanksgiving Day is a distinctly American holiday. It is unlike the festivals other cultures that celebrate a war victory or the signing of a historic document. It has, from its beginning with our pilgrim ancestors, been designed to express our thanksgiving to God for all our blessings.

We hold parades, feast together, take time off work, watch football, and teach our little ones to make paper turkeys by drawing their hands on construction paper. (*How many of us have some of those stashed away?*)

On Thursday, family will descend on our home – though I'm pretty certain our grandson is excited about the mashed potatoes as he is about seeing us!

Some of you may be by yourselves on Thanksgiving, or traveling elsewhere.

But wherever you are, I pray that you will spend a moment or two to acknowledge your blessings! I also pray that as you think about that - you'll also think about how you might [express](#) your thanks to God.

Think about it! All we have is from God - our lives, our nation, our children and grandchildren, our homes and our families, this Church, our ministries. Without praise to God, Thanksgiving Day will be incomplete!

This sermon series has really led us toward giving our thanks today. Think about the identity we have claimed in Christ. Remember? ***"I am Blessed." "I am Human." "I am Loved." "I am Saved." And today: "I am Gifted."***

I really like what Warren Wiersbe says in his autobiography, Be Myself: ***"What I am is God's gift to me; what I do with it is my gift to Him."***¹

¹ Be Myself: the Autobiography of a Bridge Builder, Warren W. Wiersbe. Copyright © 1997. Baker Publishing Group.

It's in our text from Romans 12. Go figure - a sermon that uses the Bible!
*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*²

Paul uses an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, to remind us about what it means to *be truly thankful!* He says that we are to present ourselves, our gifts, our bodies as a *“living sacrifice.”* Not dead, like a thanksgiving turkey - but living - as in the way we live our lives for God.

He reminds us in verse 3, to not be arrogant or *“think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.”*³ But he also doesn't tell us to think of ourselves **lower** than we ought to think – we all have gifts by faith.

In verses 4 and 5, he continues that theme, reminding us that though we are different, like the different parts of the body, we belong to God and to each other. Don't miss that point. In the Church, everyone has useful gifts!

As if we didn't get the message, in verse 7 and following he begins to list those different gifts: *prophecy, ministry, teaching, encouragement, generosity, leadership, compassion.* If you add to those gifts the ones Paul lists in I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, there are a total of 19 spiritual gifts!

Most Biblical scholars think that Paul's lists are meant to be open-ended and not an exhaustive or closed. So does that mean that *anything* can be a *“spiritual gift?”* **Well, in a word, no!** Talents and abilities are not the same.

In college, I learned I could make a *spoon stick to my nose!* I'll spare you a demonstration today. My youngest son, trust me on this, can *belch louder than biologically necessary!* Are those “spiritual gifts?” Of course not!

Talents and abilities, even useful ones, like singing or playing an instrument, are not by themselves *spiritual gifts.* A spiritual gift takes something more. It takes our talents and abilities and uses them *for the glory of God.*

I love the translation of Romans 12:6 in the Revised Standard Version:

² Romans 12:1-2. *New Revised Standard Version*, Copyright © 1989, 1995 by the National Council of Churches.

³ Ibid. Romans 12:3.

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”⁴

Whatever our abilities, it does us no spiritual good just to have them. Whatever they are, something happens when we ***“use them”*** to the glory of God! Paul’s point in Romans 12 is that when we do that, it is then we truly worship, then we truly show our gratitude to God, then we truly live!

I know so many people who feel unworthy, or not very *“gifted,”* or that they have nothing of use to God. Let me say this clearly. ***God has use for us all!*** **Some of you need to hear that message! It’s all over this book.**

Some have “messed up” in our past. OK! But the past is the past. It’s over. John 8:11 says: ***“You are forgiven! Go and don’t sin like that again!”***

We are confirming nine of our students as members today. 1 Timothy 4:12 says to them: ***“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young!”***

The follow-up phase of our annual giving campaign starts this week. Some of you may feel your gifts don’t matter. Let me tell you they do! In Mark 12:44, Jesus pointed to a poor widow’s gift, and said her gift was ***“the biggest of all”*** because her gift was sacrificial for her!

And it’s not just the Bible. President John F. Kennedy said: ***“...ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.”***⁵

We are at our best as Christians and citizens when we remember we each have something to give! And too often we have forgotten.

I love Annie Dillard’s words from her book, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, ***“I think the dying pray at the last, not ‘please’ but ‘thank you.’”***⁶

I hope it will be that way for me! I hope that long before my dying time comes I will learn to say fewer ***“pleases”*** and more ***“thank-yous!”***

And I pray that where ever and however you celebrate Thanksgiving Day, you will learn it too. We are all gifted!

May we live our lives and our gifts to the glory of God!

⁴ Romans 12:6. *Revised Standard Version*. Copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁵ From President John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961.

⁶ Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Annie Dillard. Copyright © 1999. Peter Smith Publishing Company.