



Thoughtful Gifts

A sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:3-13

Pentecost, Sunday, June 4th, 2017

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

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For most children, birthdays are one of the best days of the year. It is something that they look forward to for over 11 months. You'll hear this if you ask a child how old they are. In doing so, you are likely to find out that they are four and a half years old, or seven and three quarters. Each day counts and every time they go to sleep it brings them one day closer to their birthday.

Birthday's are usually fun and exciting, right? They are exciting because there is likely going to be a party. Family and friends will come together and surround the birthday girl with attention. They are fun because birthday parties usually have some sort of sweet. A birthday cake, ice cream, or as Frosty shared with us a few weeks back, Black Berry pie. Oh, and don't forget there are candles to be blown out. The most important reason birthdays are such a big deal are the presents! Presents are given to the birthday girl, and that is where the real excitement lies.

We all like to get gifts. They make us feel important and valued. Through presents we see how carefully people pay attention to our longings and desires. If a meaningful gift is given, we will use it all the time. We play with it day in and day out. We set it on the night stand so when we wake in the morning it is there to see. We carry it with us in our pocket so we can feel the outline as we roam from backyard to backyard. We like to get gifts, especially thoughtful gifts, for they show us that the giver knows us and cares for us.

The birthday gift I remember most is one I got when I turned thirteen years old. I enjoy the great out-of-doors, particularly fishing. Because of its shape I knew what the present was even before I opened it. It was a fly rod and reel. My dad knew how much I wanted one and he got me just the right one. I didn't live near a trout stream, but that afternoon I headed across the street to an open lawn and practiced my casting because I was thrilled with my gift. I still have that rod.

Every time I grab my tackle box, I look at it and remember the thoughtful gift I was given. Maybe you're still holding on to a gift like that too.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthian church he talks about gifts, but the gifts he talks about aren't like birthday presents made from material and shaped by human hands. Paul is talking about spiritual gifts. Gifts given by God through the power of the Holy Spirit. These spiritual gifts are exciting, thoughtful, and lovingly given. God knows us more deeply than anyone else. God knows us more deeply than we know ourselves. The gifts God gives us are the truest gifts we could ever receive.

As Paul points out in this passage each person are given gift(s) by God. Every person gathered here this morning has been given gift(s) from the Father Almighty. Gifts like wisdom, language, artistry, generosity, hospitality, compassion, patience, intellect, steadfastness, joy, intuition, discernment, laughter, just to name a few.

So the question is, why are we given these gifts? Well, they are not given to us for us. They are given to us for the glory of God. Paul says they are to be used for the common good of the church. In other words, God gives to us gift(s) so that we confidently share the good news of the gospel within our community and around the world. To help others who are enduring difficult times: those who have lost a family member or friend to cancer, those for whom depression has set in and darkens even the brightest days. To bring peace into the world filled by so much unrest: political strife, bullying, divorce, and all the areas of life rattled by division. To offer assistance to others who are lacking and in need: the poor, the hungry, the naked, the homeless, and the friendless. To guide others who are struggling with questions about the Christian faith: where is God, why does evil exist, what happens after death? To remain fixed on God and journey with other in the times of trouble and uncertainty. Spiritual given by God are intended to be used for carrying out our greatest commission "To love one another as Christ loves us." That is why we have the gifts we do. We have them for the common good of the church and the world.

Paul's charge to us in this passage is not always easy to do: to use our God given gifts for the building up of other people. We like our gifts and at times are selfish

with them, holding onto them and keeping them from others. As a young boy my fly rod was my most prized possession. I treasured it. I kept it for myself, after all it was given to me. When my sister asked me if she could look at it I said she could, but I would be the one holding it and turning it around so she could see all the parts. When my brother asked me if he could practice casting with it too, I told him there was no way he could touch it let alone cast it. It was my gift, my possession and only I could touch it or use it. I held onto it because I thought it wasn't for anyone else. I was selfish with my gift. I didn't want to share. I wasn't interested in the good it could bring to others. We all have gifts we are still holding onto. Things we don't want to share with others.

As [soon to be] confirmed members of the church Paul's words speak directly to us. He points out that we all have gift(s). Each and everyone of us have been given unique and intentional gift(s), by our God, creator of heaven and earth, who knows us, and call us to use them for the common good. Unlike my fly rod we aren't to keep those gifts to ourselves, to hold onto them and keep them from others. As members of this church and the body of Christ the gift(s) we have been given are for the common good. That is to say, our gift(s) are intended for the building up our families, our friends, our neighbors, the church, the body of Christ and, yes, even our enemies (the people we don't like). In using our gifts for the common good we live into the commission Jesus gave "love one another" and we take up the charge Paul has given.

Sometimes with our birthday gifts, we don't want anyone else to play with them, we want to hold them tight, to hide them away. In short, we are selfish with them. However, the gift(s) we have been given by God are not only for our use and enjoyment. God, through the words of Paul, charges us to be self-less with the thoughtful and intentional gift(s) given by God. Thus, we, as confirmed (and soon to be confirmed members of the church) are to share them for the common good of the church, the community, and all of creation. In doing so we live into our confirmation vows, take up Paul's charge, and honor our great commission to love God and one another.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.