

## Gifts of the Spirit

A sermon preached in Glebe Road United Church

Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 17, 2010

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1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

John 2: 1-11

The Official Board is meeting after church today to review our financial picture for the year just past and to discuss the budget proposed by the Board of Stewards for 2010. Too often though, stewardship is limited to matters of money – how much we can donate to the church to keep the doors open and to keep our programs operational. Stewardship should consider other things as well – the church also needs our time and talents to design and develop our programs, the things we do to be the Body of Christ in this place.

The secular world has made recruitment and advancement of employees into a science. We put our children through years of training in the right schools, and the right after-school programs to prepare them for successful careers. Parents and even parents-to-be learn about waiting lists, desirable skill sets and other techniques to give their children an advantage in the various games of life. It used to be that church membership was one of the ways that ambitious people could get ahead. A United Church not far from here used to boast that if you wanted to become President of the University of Toronto you had to become a member of their church, and they had a long list of former presidents on their rolls to prove their point. Sadly for the churches however, that is no longer true. There is no great career advantage that comes with belonging to a church. Quite the contrary! In some circles, belonging to a church suggests to some people that you are soft-headed and ignorant to the ways of the world. You would be much better spending your Sundays figuring out how to get into the Granite Club or the National Club; I gather there is a pecking order around which lakes in Muskoka or Haliburton you should own land on to be able to make the most useful contacts, and which ski hills you should frequent. And of course, you need to attend the right private schools and get into the right university programs – that goes without saying. I'm not saying any of this to make judgements or condemn; I'm merely pointing out what seems to me to be an obvious part of the world we live in.

Given this reality it is surprising that we have anyone attending church at all, and when I meet newcomers I'm always curious to understand what brought them here; what strange thought process brought them to look into the church as a place to spend their Sunday mornings. And there is always some reason; people don't show up in church for no reason. Perhaps that was the case in years gone by but not anymore.

Once newcomers are inside the doors it becomes the task of those of us already here to integrate them into our community by being friendly to them at coffee hour, and hopefully involving them in some of the activities of the church. And that brings us to Paul's letter to the Corinthians where Paul tells the new church in Corinth that everyone has been given spiritual gifts by the Spirit; everyone has a roll to play in the building up of the Body of Christ. So participating in a church is not like having a job in the secular world; going to Sunday School is not like secular school where you prepare yourself for a competitive market place. Especially in a deeply secular society like ours Church doesn't make much sense unless we make room for God to be present among us, unless we are open to the Spirit to guide us into the paths that God has planned for us to go. Paul tells us that there are varieties of gifts but the same spirit, and varieties of services but the same Lord who activates them in each one of us. Some of us are teachers, some of us are

singers and musicians, some of us have the gift of hospitality, some of us are sensitive to the needs of others. We all have gifts to give, and we are called by the same Spirit to offer our gifts.

The Official Board at Glebe Road takes this scripture seriously. At our congregational workshop in 2008 the congregation told us that we should ***“use our volunteer energy wisely and choose activities and events that reflect our values as a spiritual community and allow personal growth for those participating.”*** A year ago we developed a leadership task force that would ***“look carefully at the roles people play and ask for their feedback (perhaps using Spiritual Gift Inventory tool) to identify where they want to focus their energy in the coming year and take that into consideration when they approach people to take leadership roles in the church.”*** It’s a wonderful idea; faithful to this scripture it takes Paul’s advice seriously and applies it to our community. Wherever it has been tried it has worked very well. Everyone needs to discern what they think God is calling them to do in their lives and especially in their lives as members of the Body of Christ. And those whom God has called into positions of leadership in the Church need to be ready to assist when the rest of us try to understand their role in this community.

Many of you will remember our Eco Fair last November. It was an ambitious project that began in the spring and involved four different churches. As the leader of the coordinating team for the Eco Fair I had to recruit the members of the team, and while I could do that for our own community I could never have identified the appropriate representatives from the other churches. And so I approached my minister colleagues in those churches and asked each of them to identify the people who they thought would enjoy being on the coordinating team. Manor Road and First Christian Reform each put forward one name, and Glebe Presbyterian, the smallest church of the group, put forward three people. I took them all and with two members from Glebe Road I called our first meeting. The team jelled into a strong unit almost from the beginning. Each member would make invaluable contributions as we organized the fair.

As I look back on it now it seemed an almost impossible task to bring together a group of strangers and give leadership to a project for which none of us had any previous experience. We had to pull together four different congregations from three different denominations. And we did it. It was almost as if an invisible hand were guiding us as we went along. We faced lots of problems, and each crisis was surmounted without problems as these eight people threw themselves into the tasks at hand. Our enthusiasm for the project was infectious. The city organizer who came to our first meeting to get us started was so enthusiastic about the project that she joined the group, attended all of our meetings and took a leading role on the day of the fair. When we needed extra help she recruited an intern working for the city to help us make phone calls.

I have no doubt at all that we were guided by the Spirit throughout the whole project. Leading that group of people was probably the best experience I have ever had in the church. I believe that each of us was baptized by the Spirit as we worked together. John the Baptist said that while he baptized with water, the One coming after him would baptize with the Spirit and with fire. Like the miracle at the wedding in Cana that Ann read about, we each were the stone jars filled with water; that’s all that we could do. That’s all that John the Baptist could do. It takes the presence of the Spirit to turn the water into wine, and the best wine at that.

As we in our community now plan for the year ahead we need to harness the same Spirit to help us be the Body of Christ here at Glebe Road. We too seek to have the water of our everyday experience and our own skills and abilities turned into finest wine by the Spirit working through us and using us for God’s good purposes. The miracle of the wedding at Cana still happens; it happens every time that faithful people seek to follow the Spirit in their lives and in the church.

As we plan for our new year let us be mindful of the presence of the Spirit in our lives and in our church. Let us fill the stone jars of our lives to the brim with water in the expectation that the Spirit may turn that water into the finest wine, the best wine saved until the last. We all have our role to play; we are all called by the Spirit to play that role.

Amen