

## Varieties of Gifts

Matthew 5:13-16, I Corinthians 12:4-13

Center Church

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It's been quite the week in our country, hasn't it?

As the week went on, I kept reading the texts for today. What should we do, Jesus? You are salt. You are light. As usual, Jesus is full of metaphors and short on details for how we go about doing those things. Paul gives us some clues about discerning what our gifts are from the Spirit that enable us to be spice in the world and light to illuminate the shadows according to what we are good at, the gifts we have been given.

Have you ever spent time considering that you are gifted? That word has been co-opted by the education system to mean a high IQ or special talent, but that's not what we mean in the church. We mean what gifts God has given you as a servant, and how, as Paul says, you can use them "for the common good." Not for your own enrichment or to get you recognition or power. What are the gifts you need to be using **for the common good**. It might mean what you do for work or at school or volunteering. It might mean a talent or ability you have. It might mean what you do here with the church or with other organizations. It might mean what you do with your family.

But Jesus and Paul meant both **what** you do and **how** you do it.

And there's no one way for that to be! Up on the Communion Table today I have varieties of salt and light. There is no one way to be what Jesus asks us to be, but we each need to figure out what our gifts are and how we are best suited to use the gifts God gave us. Look at the variety up here, and then look at each other and see the variety in this room. In these times, I believe we all need to take stock of who we are as Salt and Light; what gifts of the Spirit God really needs us to be using today and kick into higher gear with them.

When you walk out of the sanctuary today, you will be given one way to discern more deeply what your Spiritual gifts may be to be used for the common good. It's one way to help clarify. Another way is to take some

focused time in prayer that is not just our monologue of need. In that time of listening, we may discern where God is calling out of us gifts that we may not have understood or accepted are in us!

Let me say clearly, in God we are all gifted children. We do neither God nor ourselves nor the world any service to be so humble that we do not think we have gifts to share. No matter who you are or at what point in life you live, you are gifted.

At the March on Washington in 1963, Martin Luther King spoke about “the fierce urgency of now.” Some of you out there were not even born in 1963; I was six and now I’m 62, and the “now” seems to be continuing and the “fierce urgency” still applies today as it did 57 years ago. It’s a fierce urgency for Christians to claim their gifts and use them to shine brighter and be saltier so that truth may be seen and God’s way of love might be made clear. What part can you play in that? What kind of salt and light are you?

I never in my life thought I would be quoting Senator Mitt Romney in a sermon, but the way he ended his Senate speech announcing his intention to vote yes to remove the President from office struck me powerfully (actually, the whole speech did). He said:

“We are all footnotes at best in the annals of history, but in the most powerful nation on Earth, the nation conceived in liberty and justice, that distinction is enough for any citizen.”

Or as Mother Teresa once said, “Everyone can do something.”

Or as Martin Luther King once wrote “Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve.”

Whatever you and I do in service to the common good, using the gifts God has given us, being salt and light in whatever way we can, will be “a footnote at best in the annals of history,” and yet. I think of the followers of Jesus who are, at best, footnotes in scriptures or history. Those whose names have been forgotten and yet made a difference that was remembered. The woman at the Samaritan well. The Ethiopian eunuch. The nameless tens and hundreds and thousands over the years who have kept God’s dream alive.

There is a fierce urgency for us to be clear on what our gifts are and seek diligently for ways to use them for the common good every day. There is a fierce urgency for us to be salt and light.

And for those who think this is a hopeless task, that good simply cannot win, I urge you to stay hopeful. That hope is itself a gift of the Spirit, a manifestation of faith for the common good. One of the great, historic spiritual gifts of the church is to be a bearer of that cosmic, sacred hope when others have lost hope.

I read a terrific article by a man named Steve Almond on Thursday. Here is some of what he said:

“In this climate of calculated cynicism — a cynicism designed to make us feel hopeless — we need to be fanatical in our optimism, We need only look at the history of this country to see the proof of this fanatical optimism. Abolition. Suffrage. The labor movement. The New Deal. Civil Rights. In each case, the outcome seemed impossible. And yet millions of Americans rose up and took action to make our union more perfect. It’s not enough at this point for us to wait around for others — the courts or suburban women or millennials or the media — to come to our rescue. We have to come to our own rescue. To do so, we must place our faith in the fragile belief that our own individual actions as citizens still matter. We have to shake off the modern American temptation to passively consume civic dysfunction as disposable entertainment. ***Be a fanatical optimist. Make a plan. Take action. Listen to your conscience.***”

In our context, your conscience, of course, is the Holy Spirit in you. I would add to his list, listen to God in prayer, to the words of Jesus. If you know what your gifts are and how you are called to be salt and light in the way you need to be, then do it. If you are not sure, take the little test we will give you and see if it helps you to figure out what you are best gifted to do, what kind of salt and light you need to be today. Pray. Do not give in to cynicism. God is. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, according to Jesus. He didn’t say “**be** the salt of the earth.” He said “**YOU ARE!**” it is part of your baptismal identity. It’s time to be who we are. Amen.