

I. Intro. :

A. If you talk to any of our church staff who use the computers here, **it's no secret we've been having information technology problems in the past couple weeks:**

- One day someone can't access internet & email while others can. Then the next day it's a different person who can't go online.
- Sometimes our computers freeze up or run maddeningly slow
- Sometimes we can't access the common files we share on the server.
- I've half-joked with other staff that I think we have mischievous computer gremlins

Our IT troubleshooters have examined ways that we might increase our internet speed or strengthen the WiFi signal. But I found myself complaining that I wished we were not so dependent on WiFi for our regular operations.

In talking with some of you, I learned that your workplace networks have the computers hardwired, so they are not dependent on WiFi connections. This made me wonder why we couldn't be hardwired and avoid that WiFi vulnerability. But I assumed that making THAT happen would take more time and technical effort. I figured it wouldn't be a quick fix, so I braced myself for some more days of frustrating work on inconsistent computers.

Then 2 days ago I realized that most of our offices already have the blue Ethernet cable that allows a computer to directly connect to our network, without depending on WiFi. Lo & behold, when I knelt down to look behind my desk there was a blue cable, with a jack not plugged in to anything. A more reliable connection for me to do my work was there all the time, and I just needed to plug it in! But instead I made false assumptions and I didn't look in the right place.

B. You know, as we continue our Fanning the Flames series on gifts, **sometimes as Christians we fail to "plug in" the gifts and resources God has already provided us.**

1. So we get by, trying to use other gifts and skills that are not optimum, because they are the skills we already know how to do.
 - a) In our high-pressured world, it just takes less effort to do things the same old way.
 - b) What's that old proverb? "If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."
 - c) So while God may give us a toolbox with multiple gifting tools in it, we end up using the same old hammer.
2. Why don't we pick up other perfectly good "tools" from God? I can think of at least 3 reasons:
 - a) 1st: sometimes we don't even know we have that tool ... like it's been hidden out of sight in some back corner of our spiritual house

Text: 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27-31a; 1 Pet. 4:7-11; Rom. 12:1

(Fanning the Flames series) 2

- b) Other times we see the tool, but we don't "really see it",
like if you insist that you need a ratchet to remove a bolt & without your ratchet set the job goes unfinished ...
even though you have a pliers ready to go which could do the job just fine.
- c) And finally sometimes we are just plain stubborn in our ways:
we know that we have access to this other tool, but the other tool is not as much fun ...
or it takes some effort to learn how to use it ... so we let it sit there unused

C. Last week Greg Hire reminded us of the challenging parable of the talents, which Jesus taught his disciples in Matt. 25:

1. You may recall that in the parable, the sin that brought judgment on one slave was neglecting a resource which the master expected him to actively use and grow
2. That parable also reminded us of the unbelievably strong and abundant relationships we will have with God and others when we actively put our God-given gifts to profitable use in God's kingdom

II. Today, when it comes to our spiritual gifts, I want to build on Greg's message last week ... **Let's put those shoes on & get going with our specific gifts!**

A. I say specific because God didn't give us generic gifts, God gave us specific ones ... specific gifts to be used in specific ways to build up God's kingdom

1. Although our gifts are indeed God-given, let us not assume they are rigidly assigned forever
2. Some gifts may be with us for a season of life but are not necessarily lifelong
 - a) Our life experiences & our own personal growth may open us up to gifts we wouldn't have been ready to exercise earlier in life
 - b) Another way to say that is: a certain stage of life we're in may mean we've "outgrown" a certain gift that was more appropriate @ a younger age
3. Then there are some gifts that may continue over time in our lives but the specific ways we exercise them may change, just as the people and places around us will change over time

B. The Bible gives us many different examples of particular gifts God has given to God's people

1. How many are there? In 1 Cor. 12 and in Romans 12 and in Eph. 4, we have several lists of spiritual gifts
 - a) So depending on how those passages are read, you can find some Christian inventories of spiritual gifts that identify a different total number of gifts ... Some say there are 16, some as many as 23
 - b) For our purposes here at Waterford Mennonite Church, the precise label of your gift is not highly important.
2. What matters much more is that you know the gift you are strongest in (or maybe the strongest 2 or 3)
3. What matters is that you know the gifts God has given you AND ultimately, that you put those gifts to use for the common good
 - a) Giving your gifts traction ... putting them to use so they don't sit dormant ... THAT's what we're emphasizing the last few weeks of this series
 - b) Putting them to use is part of what I believe is referred to in another Scripture text that talks about gifts – in Romans 12 ... let's look at that briefly (perhaps turn to it in your Bibles)

III. (Our spiritual acts of worship)

A. Verses 4-8 of Romans 12 are another classic Bible passage dealing with spiritual gifts

1. At the beginning of that chapter is a verse that has prompted many sermons over the years. It goes like this:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. (NIV)

- a) The 1st 8 verses of Romans 12 is really Apostle Paul giving a call to holy living, in light of all of God's salvation & mercy
 - b) Paul uses the language of offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, but I strongly believe one of the ways we do that is by putting our gifts to use for the common good
2. Pause right now w/ me please for a little exercise: bring into your mind an image (mental picture) of you yourself at worship ...
 - a) Imagine in your mind what it looks like when you are worshiping God ... Got that image?
 - b) Tell me please, for how many of you does that image have you sitting in this church, or some other church or chapel or holy place where prayer & singing & preaching happen? (*show of hands* ... that's not a wrong answer ... but also not a complete answer)
 - c) So as we consider how we use our gifts, I urge you to frame your gifting in Paul's terms in Romans 12:1 -- that these are your acts of worship!

3. If we take seriously Romans 12:1 AND the verses that follow soon after it about gifts, then our mental images of worshiping God need to expand.

- a) They should also include images like teaching SS or building something in God's name or encouraging a hurting friend or administering a project for the church.
- b) Let me say it conversely: You say you're a Xian ... you say you worship God & that's why you're even here today, but if you're just sitting on your God-given gifts, or if you're underutilizing them, then you are NOT fully worshiping God!

B. God doesn't want Sunday worshipers!

1. God wants daily 24/7 worshipers ... people whose use of their gifts every day in ordinary places testifies that they are God-worshipers

- a) This kind of gift usage is just as much of a testimony to your worshiping God ... as your Sunday church attendance is ...
- b) in fact, using your spiritual gifts is an even stronger testimony than just showing up here on Sunday morning

2. What happens in this space @ 8:00 & 10:45 on Sundays is not the only Waterford Mennonite worship hour.

3. Every other hour of the day, whenever Waterford church people are using their gifts for the common good ... THAT is also a Waterford worship hour

IV. As we conclude this series, **the biggest Q is the one on your bulletin cover, "What do I do with these gifts?"**

A. That's a general Q with a rather simple, even obvious answer:

- 1. You put them into use for the common good in Christ
 - a) Ie. Put those shoes on & set those gifts into motion
 - b) But simple answers are not always simple to implement
- 2. Underneath that basic Q are 2 underlying Qs that some of you may have been wondering for a long time:
 - a) "How do I know what my unique gifts are?" ... AND
 - b) "How can I specifically use them?"
- 3. Perhaps you can't seem to "get over the hump" of exercising your gifts in Christ, rather than just talking about them

B. Let me offer you 3 ways to "get over the hump" and actually put those shoes on:

1. 1st, is a survey tool that will help you discover your gifts:
 - a) It's called the Spiritual Gifts Survey
 - b) This is more of the "smoush" survey (to use Greg's highly technical term) ... This is about naming your gifts & getting them out there in front of you
 - c) This tool will help you identify the 4 or 5 gifts in which you are strongest and the ones with which you are not well-gifted
2. The 2nd tool is called our Spiritual Gifts Opportunities form
 - a) This is more of the "splash" instrument, where you identify how you want to actually express your gifts
 - b) On this form you can express your interest for serving in a wide variety of ministries here at Waterford or out in the broader community, drawing on the gifts you discovered in the 1st survey
3. These 2 survey tools will be available to all adult Sunday School classes this year when each class will study a gifting-related book called I Am a Church Member
 - a) The Pathfinders class is currently studying the book and is about to complete these surveys together
 - b) The other classes will work with the book together with the surveys in the winter or spring quarters.
4. That leads directly into a 3rd way for you to get over the hump: by conversation with one or a few trusted people.
 - a) I'm referring to a conversation specifically about your gifts & how you might use them
 - b) I recognize that some people prefer exploring something as personal as their own gifts through conversation rather than through survey tools
 - c) If this sounds scary to you, let me reassure you these conversations are about affirming and encouraging you, not about criticism
 - d) I see these conversations happening in several different ways:

For most of you it will be within your SS classes after you've taken the 2 surveys

But I also encourage any existing small groups here to do the same

If small group and SS class settings don't work out for you, contact Greg or one of us pastors. We'd love to talk with you about your gifts and how you use them for God's glory
 - e) In addition to these existing groups, my hope at Waterford is for a more systematic conversational approach –

I'd like to see everyone have the chance to check in with a church leader, at your home or maybe in a coffee shop ...

Text: 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27-31a; 1 Pet. 4:7-11; Rom. 12:1

(Fanning the Flames series) 6

We would talk about how the church can minister to you and about how you can use and grow your gifts, in the church and beyond.

C. Why do I want to see a more conversational approach to gifting? 2 reasons:

1. Because I'm convinced it works & I've seen it work.

Almost 20 years ago Janette & I were in a small group at Walnut Hill Mennonite Church where once a year every small group had a deliberate conversation focusing on each group member, his or her strengths and how the others might see them using those gifts in the church. For me, this was a tremendous blessing

If you've ever had doubts about your own abilities, it is such a boost to hear others in the church affirming what they see in you. There is great power in such gifting conversations with people you trust. Don't underestimate that power. I'd like to see that happen here, as well. I challenge you to enter these conversations.

2. Gifting conversations in church also help us to live out the 2nd part of our mission statement for Fanning the Flames:

- a) Listen again to this mission statement, which you have at the bottom of your printed order of service:

God, who gifts everyone in the church, calls each person to offer their abilities and spiritual gifts to God and the congregation, and also calls them to fan the flames of others to utilize their gifts.

- b) Many of us are quite willing to offer our own abilities and gifts, but reluctant to call other people to utilize their gifts

Our extreme North American individualism tells us to stay out of other people's business and let them live their own lives.

But that's not a biblical vision of what Xian community looks like.

Phrases in the Bible like "bearing each others' burdens" and "exhorting one another to good deeds" are not possible when everyone in the church stays out of everyone else's personal lives.

- c) When we recognize valuable gifts & potential in our brothers and sisters, and we do not encourage & draw those out, because we're "minding our own business", we are not, in fact, being church ... we are abdicating church.

V. Conclusion

A. I call you again, as Christ calls you, to present your whole self, including your gifts, as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God, which is your true & proper worship

1. Look for ways to make every waking hour a worship hour ...

Text: 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27-31a; 1 Pet. 4:7-11; Rom. 12:1

(Fanning the Flames series) 7

2. At the end of your day, may you look back and see some gifts you exercised (some worship acts that you did) which allowed God to be praised through Jesus Christ, as it says in 1 Peter 4.

B. One of my favorite Bryan Moyer Suderman songs speaks of the many gifts in the body of Christ, as well as how we show our oneness when we stand with brothers & sisters who suffer

1. The song is called "You're Not Alone"
2. As we listen to part of it, I invite you to ponder the following question on the screen. You'll soon have a chance to write your response to it on a little "flame" to add to our worship visual.
- 3.

Flame visual focus question

Beyond this worship space,
through what action this week
will you worship God?

Beyond this worship space, through what action this week will you worship God?