

August 5, 2018  
Ephesians 4:11-16  
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## “Many Gifts”

Good morning! It's August already. When I was a kid, and even a young parent, August was the last month of summer vacation; the month before school started. Now it's the end of the summer -- sorry about that students and teachers. I know that there's a lot of preparation and some anxiety for both students and teachers at this time of year. I have another association with the month of August that I never had as a kid: there are two McFadden family birthdays in August -- my husband Tim and my son Joel -- so this is a time of year that I'm thinking about birthday celebrations and birthday presents.

I don't know where you come down on birthday presents -- different families have different practices, and at least in my family those have changed over time. A birthday celebration for an eight year old is probably different than a celebration for a forty-eight or an eighty-eight year old. Are you ever too old to get presents? Does getting something wrapped in a box transition to getting an experience -- like going to a concert, or going away on vacation? Do you want to be surprised, or do you want your loved ones to click on the link you sent them so you get exactly what you asked for?

There aren't right or wrong answers to these questions, of course: couples, families, and friends give presents however works for them, with the resources they have, and however it makes folks feel recognized and valued. Presents belong to whomever receives them, and it great when you get a present you really want.

I'm going to make a distinction this morning, between *presents* and *gifts*. I'm not sure you'd find this distinction if you looked in a dictionary, but I believe if you look at our text from Ephesians 4 you will see what I'm talking about. The gifts which are mentioned in in

verse 11 include being apostles, being prophets, being a teacher or an evangelist. Like the presents of a concert, a vacation, or a nice meal with friends, gifts like teaching and evangelism can't be wrapped up in a box. But unlike a present, a gift is something which we are given to use with other people and for other people. Also, unlike a present -- which comes from a person -- the gifts in Ephesians 4 come from God.

If you have been paying attention during the announcement time the past few weeks or checking your email account at home, you know that Creekside's Gifts and Placement Team has a survey they have asked each member to fill out. I won't ask for a show of hands, but if you haven't yet replied to the survey, or need help to fill it out, here's why I hope you will make the effort to do it: the body of Christ needs the gifts of every member. That's not my idea, or a mandate from the Gifts and Placement Team, that's in Ephesians 4: we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body is building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16) The survey will be helpful so that the Gifts and Placement Team will better understand the gifts in our congregation and can help place people on ministry teams, but it's even more important that we as people of God explore and acknowledge the gifts which God has given us.

I don't think this list from Ephesians is meant to be the beginning and end of God's gifts: I know of and can name plenty of gifts in this congregation -- and the people to whom they have been given -- which are not on this list: the gifts of hospitality and humor and attention to detail; gifts of encouragement and mechanical skill and of planting and tending; gifts of generosity and enthusiasm and listening. I could go on and on. I won't -- but I bet I could name a gift which you would recognize in yourself, and certainly gifts which you would recognize in other people in this congregation.

Gifts are not the same as skills -- many of you have gifts which you have intentionally cultivated, through education and training or both. Some of those specialized skills have been particularly useful in our congregation, and we are grateful for your expertise. But you don't have to be an expert at anything to use your gifts for God. This passage and other New Testament texts call the church the body of Christ: if the parts of the body don't work together, the body is

paralyzed. The goal of a healthy body is not to have one amazingly skilled hand, it's to have hands and feet and arms and legs which work together to do what the brain directs them to do. The function of the body doesn't depend on each part being exceptional; the function of the body depends on those parts working in together.

So as I see it, these are three of the reasons which we need to acknowledge and share the gifts we have received from God:

First, when we are aware of the gifts that we have been given as individuals, we begin to be aware of how precious each one of us is to God. Each one of us has unique gifts, and a unique combination of gifts. No one has every gift -- an awareness of the gifts I have is not only an awareness of my abilities, it's also an awareness of my limitations. If you know me at all, you know that our congregation would not be well-served with me in any sort of role with mechanical operations. Thank God for our Property Team and other people who share their gifts to do those things.

Second, an awareness of the gifts which God has given us as a congregation should shape the direction of our ministry and our vision. It makes sense to lean in the direction of our strength as a group: some of those assets which you identified at our Table Talk a month ago are hospitality, outreach and worship. Of course we need to have a balance in what we do and try to be as healthy as we can, but if you are a good cross-country runner, it's OK to strive to be an even better runner, instead of trying to be a wrestler. Our gifts shape who we are as a group, and acknowledging those gifts helps us to imagine what more God might be calling us to be.

Finally, a healthy and cooperative use of our gifts is the best way which God can use us to serve others. The goal is not to collect a bunch of talented people so that we can congratulate ourselves on how very talented we are. Yesterday I saw a lot of you working together on hospitality and worship and fellowship for the Mockler family. You might have thought you were just handing out bulletins or washing dishes -- and of course, you were--but that is a ministry to a family and a witness to Creekside as the body of Christ. God bless you. Our goal as the body of Christ should be to do the work of Christ

**in the world. Teaching, healing, evangelizing, and blessing others in Christ's name.**

**Unlike a present which someone gives to us for ourselves, a gift from God comes with strings attached: those strings are the ligaments which are joined and knit together so that we can work together as the body of Christ. Our gifts are not only for ourselves, gifts from God benefit us and those around us. Many gifts, many members, many ways to share God's love with others.**

**This morning we will have the service of anointing. We offer anointing for healing of mind, body, or spirit -- for physical bodies or relationships which need healing. But anointing is also for commissioning for special service. If you feel that you have been given a gift which you feel called to share at Creekside, I'd invite you to come forward for anointing, if you feel led. When I come to anoint you, tell me what healing you need, or what gift you are bringing, and I will anoint you to have God's Spirit give you comfort and for God's Spirit to direct you to use that gift for building up the body of Christ. After everyone has been anointed I will invite these friends to lay hands on you for a prayer of blessing.**