

## Living by the Spirit 10-18-09

By Mary Jane Button-Harrison

### I Corinthians 12:4-13

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup>All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Picture this cartoon: There's a guy singing his heart out at church in front of the microphone. The sign next to him reads "Church choir auditions today 4 p.m." Down in the corner are two people and

one says to the other, "He says God has sent him the gift of music. Personally, I think it was sent to the wrong address." Bob Watson will tell you he's one of the paid people at First Christian... we pay him not to sing. The Apostle Paul tells us we all have gifts. The spirit has equipped each of us with gifts. But we don't all have the same gifts. Figuring out what your gift is and using it faithfully can be tricky, to say the least. Sometimes we are so aware of other people's gifts that it is hard to see our own. Yet Paul tells us, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." I want to reflect this morning on gifts. How do we help people discover their gifts? How do we encourage and develop them? And then how do we go about putting them to use, working together in the church?

Here's a fable that shows one way to do this. It's called the animal school.

Once upon a time, the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of a 'new world.' So they organized a school. They adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running,

climbing, swimming and flying, and to make it easier to administer, all the animals took the same subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming, better in fact than his instructor, and made passing grades in flying, but he was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming to practice running. This was kept up until his web feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school, so nobody worried about that except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground-up instead of from the tree-top-down. He also developed a Charlie horse from over-exertion and then got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class, he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there.

At the end of the year, an abnormal eel that could swim exceedingly well, and also run, climb, and fly a little, held the highest average and was valedictorian.

The prairie dogs stayed out of school and fought the tax levy because the administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to a badger and later joined the ground-hogs and gophers to start a successful school of their own.

Churches need to be careful not to fall into the same trap. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about gifts, saying, "Some people will be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." Each of these are important gifts and the church and the world need these gifts, but this is by no means an exhaustive list.

There are many gifts the spirit of God imparts in order to do the

work of God on earth. You heard Paul, "To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." So serve one another; serve God, and live out your faith with whatever gift each of you has received. Paul uses the metaphor of a body to talk about the church. Later in I Corinthians 12 he talks about how each part of the body is needed in order to have a healthy, functioning body. We need hands and feet and eyes and ears and even livers and kidneys in order to function properly. And in the body of Christ, Paul says, "The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor..."and all members have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

The Bible gives us many examples of people using their gifts working together as a team. Cooperation and teamwork is the advice

Moses gets help from his father-in-law Jethro. In Exodus chapter 18, Jethro sees that Moses can't do all the leading by himself. "You're going to wear yourself out," Jethro tells his son-in-law. "Both you and these people. The task is too heavy for you. You can't do it all alone." So he convinces Moses to spread out the leadership and share it with 70 others.

Jesus does exactly the same thing in calling disciples and sending them out; first with the twelve and then with 70 others. He sends them out to do the same things he's been doing - healing people, visiting and eating in people's homes, and proclaiming the Kingdom. Jesus wasn't a lone ranger and he didn't tell his followers to become lone rangers. He worked with people. And when he commissioned his followers for mission, he sent them out in teams - two by two. It's as if fellowship and cooperation are part of good news we are to proclaim and live.

Let's go back that story I shared with the children. The story of Swimmy. Swimmy had a unique gift. He was black. All the other fish

were red. And that made it possible for the fish to swim in a formation so they looked like a giant fish, with swimmy as the eye. It made them safe. They could even scare big fish away.

But in that story, Swimmy's unique gift depended on the rest of the fish to support it. All together, they had to cooperate.

The same could be said for many and perhaps all of our gifts and talents. They're nothing without a community in which to share them. They're nothing if others don't acknowledge them and mobilize around them and use them for the good of all. As a community, we want to recognize and use the variety of gifts of the people here. We want each person to add their gifts to the pool of gifts and work cooperatively in order to do amazing and wonderful things in ministry. That's the beauty of the body of Christ. Each one is needed. And when we work together for God's purposes, we can do great things because of the way the Spirit works through us. Everyone has gifts, and although our gifts are different, we are, none the less, equals to

each other, and we can pull together and become greater than the sum of what we can do apart.

I want to close with five lessons on teamwork and cooperation that come from geese.

**Fact:** As each goose flaps its wings by flying in a V formation, the whole flock adds 71 percent more flying range than if each bird flew alone.

**Lesson:** People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling on the thrust of one another.

**Fact:** Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the "lifting power" of the bird immediately in front.

**Lesson:** If we have as much sense as a goose, we will step in formation with those who are headed where we want to go.

**Fact:** When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies at the point position.

**Lesson:** It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks, and sharing leadership, interdependent with each other.

**Fact:** The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

**Lesson:** We need to make sure our honking from behind is encouraging - not something less helpful.

**Fact:** When a goose gets sick or wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow to help and protect. They stay until the goose is either able to fly again or dies.

**Lesson:** If we have as much sense as geese, we'll stand by each other like that.

We are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. To each of us has been given gifts of the Spirit to use together as we serve God through whom all things are possible. Amen.