

The message given by Rev. Dr. Tom Zoelzer on Sunday, January 24, 2010 based on 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

## What's in Your Wallet?

Rev. Elizabeth Conroy, a Lutheran pastor in Canada, writes: *Normally I love teaching Confirmation class. However, I remember one year that I found teaching Confirmation a chore. That was the year Sandra first started class.*

*Sandra was 13 years old. She was an intelligent, deeply caring person. Unfortunately, Sandra felt as if no one liked her and that everyone was out to get her. Consequently, she verbally and physically lashed out at others before they could hurt her. Naturally, the class treated her in the same way that she treated them. Nothing I tried seemed to end the hostility that disrupted every class. I was at my wit's end. My prayer before and after every class became, "Lord, use me to help Sandra."*

*I'll never forget the class when the Lord did just that. We were studying 1 Corinthians 12:8-11. In preparation for the class, I wrote each person's name at the top of a sheet of paper. Following the name I wrote, "I believe the Spirit has given you the ability to..." After reading and discussing the passage, I passed out the sheets of paper and instructed the students to write down one of the gifts that they felt the Spirit had given them. They were then to fold the sheet of paper so that their name remained visible but their answer was hidden. Then they were to pass their sheets to the right, and that person was to write down a gift that they felt the Spirit had given to the person whose name was on top of the paper.*

*When the sheets were full, they were given back to their owner to read. As Sandra read her sheet I was surprised to see tears running down her cheeks. "I never thought anybody liked me or knew I had gifts," she said. The Spirit had given each of us another gift – the gift of understanding.*

I have a question for you today? How many people thought I am going to talk about money today because of my message title?... (count) I thought so. Actually, we are going to talk about spiritual gift, but I thought the title, 'What's in your wallet?' would get your attention because it goes with what I want to speak about today.

A wallet is a good illustration to the meaning of our scripture lesson. For those of you who have a wallet, my hunch is that you have a variety of things in there, not just one things. A wallet is designed to carry money, credit cards, identification, pictures, hideaway key, etc. A wallet is designed to carry a variety of things for your benefit.

The apostle Paul today in scripture is making the point that a Christian congregation is designed to be blessed with a variety of spiritual gifts for the common good of all and the common good of the world. Like a wallet, there are all kinds of things needed for the common good. Being part of a church is discovering and using your spiritual gifts for your enrichment and the enrichment of others.

The apostle Paul loved the people of Corinth. It was a congregation he formed and seemed to excel in vitality and faith. But like any church they had questions and growing pains about how to follow Jesus. So Paul wrote them as he ministered in other locations.

In chapters 12, 13, and 14 of 1 Corinthians, he deals with the spiritual gifts that come from God and what we are to do with them. The big issue seems to be how to view one gift in particular – speaking in tongues.

Speaking in tongues is the gift of speaking in a heavenly language. Apparently, some of the people of Corinth had this gift, some could interpret what they person speaking in tongues were saying, and others in the congregation did not have either ability. Paul's letter to the Corinthians seemed to be indicating that those who could speak in tongues felt their gift was the most important, and this was causing disruption in the congregation.

Paul writes them to say that it is great that some could speak in tongues, but that this kind of gift was only one of many gifts that come from God and that they are all important for the common good of all. So, Paul writes down a list of spiritual gifts - wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working miracles, prophecy, as well as speaking and interpreting heavenly languages. In his letter to the Romans, chapter 12, he also mentions ministering to others, teaching, preaching, generosity, compassion, and leadership as spiritual gifts. The list in 1 Corinthians 12 is not the only spiritual gifts.

So he teaches us: <sup>4</sup>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.

Paul tells them and us that one of the blessings of being a Christian is to be given spiritual gifts and use those gifts as part of your Christian

service and activity. What is your spiritual gift or gifts? What's in your wallet?

I always get a kick about asking people about their spiritual gifts because most people don't think they have one which I find amusing because in society we spend a great deal of money and time helping people discover their talent. Part of the educational process in our country is to expose people to all the disciplines and skills they need for life and then help them find the ones that they are good at, that brings them joy and satisfaction, and then consider those fields as their life's vocation.

One of the reasons that the church spends so much time exposing people to the different aspects of faith – gifts, services, activities, ministries – so that people can discover what they are good at, what brings them joy, and invite them to use those gifts for Christian service. Discovering your gift or talent and using it not only builds up the Christian community, but it also brings you joy for using that gift.

Christian Swartz, who is a German Christian and the author of the book *Natural Church Development*, puts it this way: *When people live according to their spiritual giftedness, they are no longer working in their own strength, but the Holy Spirit works in them. Thus, even though you are 'just an ordinary person' you can accomplish, in the true sense of the word, extraordinary things.*" He goes on to say, *"One of the interesting corollary results of (his) research (about Christians) was the discovery that no factor influences the sense of joy and living of a Christian life more than if we are living it according to our spiritual gifts. I can only support this conclusion from my own life. Ever since I tried to shape my ministry in*

*harmony with my giftedness I have experienced three effects: First, I am happier; second, I am more effective, and third, I am more misunderstood by other Christians than ever before. Maybe this is a necessary price to pay for wanting to follow Christ's calling.*

As Christians, we are invited to put our faith in God through Jesus Christ and invited to accept Jesus as our Savior and guide. But then we are invited to grow in that experience by discovering our spiritual gifts and using them first to help other people and as a result experience the joy that comes from sharing that gift.

So what is it? What is your spiritual gift and how are you using it? Is it wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, speaking in God's language, teaching, preaching, generosity, compassion, leadership, service, acts of love? What is your gift and how are you using it?...

While you are thinking about your spiritual gift and how you are being called to us it, let me say a few things: First, Paul tells us that there are a variety of gifts, a variety services, and a variety of activities. Let's face it. Some things around the church are necessary but rather mundane. Others are quite exciting, but all are important! The key is to do both the necessary things but also the things that allows you to share your gift.

You are a gifted person. And my hunch is that other gifts emerge as you become older, and new ways to experience God and experience the joy of Christian service emerges as you practice discipleship.

One of the reasons your congregation supports the idea of "Worship +2 is to support the idea of coming to worship for spiritual nurture, taking

a class for educational enlightenment and spiritual depth, and then finding opportunities to serve using your gifts and interests for the glory of God and for your joy. It is the job of the church to help you discover your gifts and then help you use those gifts in ways that builds up the ways of God and the world. There is so much we could be doing!

So, have you thought of it? What are your spiritual gifts? If I were going to have you write a list today what would you write?

Now how are you using that gift as a way to serve and find joy and fulfillment in sharing that gift? What else are you being called to do?

I believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Spirit of Christ that inspires us to be involved in something bigger than ourselves. What are you being called to do with your gift and how are you finding fulfillment?

All gifts are a blessing from God and all come from the same Spirit. Followers of Christ give God the glory and then work together for the common good of all. What's in your wallet of spiritual gifts? Amen.