

MANY GIFTS—ONE SPIRIT
I Corinthians 12: 1-11
November 7, 2010

From the very beginning of our faith tradition, Christians have been a gift-bearing/gift receiving people. Asking which came first is like asking the proverbial chicken and egg question.

We've been gift-bearing people since the Magi brought exotically wrapped presents to the baby Jesus, bringing him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The tradition continued as the disciples learned the power of gift-giving on the mountain where people gave their gifts of fish and bread to each other so that over 5000 were fed. Later, a saint of the early church, Nicholas, was to instill in our culture an overwhelming tradition of gift-giving, so that now we wouldn't know how to live without the season of Christmas.

We have also been gift-receiving people. We understand that God gave us the gift of Jesus Christ to show us that we are all loved by our Divine Parent. The gift of his life is celebrated in the continual teachings we receive from the four Gospels, but it is his ultimate death that we accept the greatest present we've ever received from God—that is the promise of forgiveness and eternal life.

This morning we are reminded of the dual nature of the Christian experience—both as gift-bearing and gift-receiving people.

Have you opened your gift box from God lately?

I just happened to bring my gift box from God to show you what I've received. Some of these gifts were hand-wrapped and delivered directly by my Godly Companion. Some of these gifts were sent to me from God via many of you. I'd like to open my gift box from God, and maybe you can think about what's in yours, too, as we celebrate the presents we have received as people of faith.

- I. FAMILY—Let's see, the first gift I received from God came wrapped in a home. Inside that wrapping was my family—my mother and father, my two brothers, my grandparents and cousins and aunts and uncles. If you were to unwrap this particular God-gift, you might also find

husbands, wives, or loving life-partners. You might find children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews—a whole slew of people that share the very life-blood within you. Though perhaps this gift has become broken with much use, through divorce, estrangement, and even through death, still we would not be the people we are today without the gifts of each individual whom we have called “family” at one time or another. I thank God for the gift of family—for all that we learn from them, from the love that is shared within them, for the life that is given.

- II. **WORLD:** The next gift I received from God is the gift of this beautiful planet that I call home—and the expanse of universe in which it lays. I’ve brought some pieces of this world that represent the colorful and vibrant wrappings which I love to save from year to year. I hold close to my heart those awe-gasping places where I have felt God’s presence as present for me. If you were to look in your gift box, you might find the Grand Canyon, the Canadian Rockies, the Gallapagos Islands, the tors of Scotland, or the waterfalls of Costa Rica. Or you might just think about your own back yard. Truly, the very air we breathe and water we drink is a gift we receive in our God box each moment.
- III. **OUR NATIONS:** Tied to our world is the gift of the nation of my birth. Sometimes, the week after an election, I have to look hard to see the gift. The rhetoric of politics seems to heighten our differences to a point where harmony feel irreparably damaged.

And yet, through it all, we manage to muddle through and continue to pledge our allegiance to work with one another despite those differences. We continue to seek the best for all of us, though we come at it from different angles.

Yes it is hard work. But the things we value most in life we’ve had to work hard for. And so I treasure the gift of the nation of my birth, as I know Yunkyong treasures the nation of her birth—South Korea; and Raymond Tolentino treasures the nation of his birth—The Phillipines; and Maria Chavez celebrates the nation of her birth—Mexico. Though they are all different, they’ve been wrapped up and put in our God box.

- IV. MIND: What else had God given me in my gift box? Ah-ha! These books! I love books! And I appreciate the intellect that allows me to read, to learn, to deepen my understanding of the world and the people who inhabit it with me. I especially have always loved books that give me glimpses into the nature of God's self. Now I know that some of you might look in your gift box and find books missing—you might not like to read, or you may never have been given the right tools to learn to read. But I'm sure there are other places where you have learned to deepen your knowledge—through art or music or simply by using your eyes to observe life as it happens. I thank God for the minds we have inside our heads that are amazing mechanisms when you think about it—because we CAN think about it.
- V. HUMAN BODY—I guess if I'm talking about my brain and my head, I should also thank God for the rest of my body. Those of you in the medical professions who have explored in depth the mystery of this combination of flesh and bones and blood and DNA might remember the time when you first began to comprehend the incredible intricacies of this compact mechanism that makes us individuals. It is amazing that everything works as well as it does! Oh, I know! Many of us don't view our bodies as gifts—they're either too fat or too thin, too tall or too short, marred in some way by defect or disease. But the human body—in fact the bodies of all living creatures are amazing! Even as our body begins to slow down and even falter as we age, still, that process of letting go of the human body is a part of God's gift for receiving God's greatest gift of eternal presence.
- VI. CHURCH: I know that because of the gift of the church. It is from the treasured teachings of the Church that I know about Jesus Christ and his gift of life for me. It is from the treasured fellowship within the church that I have experienced love and care when I have felt torn and grieving.

East Dallas Christian Church is in my gift box—and all the people who make it up. You knew that would be in there for me. I hope it is in your gift box, too.

- VII. CHECKBOOK: Let's see, what else is in here. Oh yes, another gift that doesn't get the acknowledgement that it probably deserves—my checkbook!

This thing represents the money I receive from the work that I do, and the money I spend on the things I need and want. In essence, it represents the fruits of my labor. But sometimes I don't think of it as a gift—I take it for granted, or expect it as my due.

If there's one thing I've learned from rummaging around in my gift box—nothing here is necessarily our due! Our money, our families, our mind and body, our church—all of it is part of the larger gift of life that has been given to us by our God.

- VIII. Oh, here's one more gift. It's an odd thing, really. It's a shard of pottery. This past week I was in a hurry and I was thinking about other things when I put a plate on the kitchen counter too close to the edge. It fell onto the floor and shattered into many different pieces.

Now it's not a family relic or an expensive piece of china. But as I stood looking at all the scattered pieces on the floor it threw me into a drama-queen moment when I just thought everything in the world was as broken as that plate—threats of terrorism on flights, the disconnect between political parties in this country, broken relationships of couples that I had married, my own broken tooth in the back of my mouth which meant I had to have a crown put on it.

Then my thoughts went to Mark and Elaine Byrkit, and the week they had just faced. Many of us heard about Elaine's mother whose home had burned down, and though she had lost almost everything to fire, she and her animals had made it out alive, for which we gave thanks. Then Mark's aunt died, and even though he had been working 14-hour

days to finish a work project, he had made plans to travel to Illinois with his mother to the funeral when they received the call last Saturday morning that Elaine's mother had surprisingly died of a heart attack.

Talk about shattered lives!

And yet, when I spoke with Mark after it was all over, he shared with me how comforted his family was by the knowledge that their church family was praying for them, surrounding them with our concerns and our care. They felt the gift of our presence, and of other Christian brothers and sisters around the country who held them in prayer.

What is it that holds us all together? What is it that holds the many pieces of our lives together?

That was Paul's emphasis in our scripture today—"Now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."

We have received many gifts—some which come covered in ragged and torn wrappings, some of which come worn from years of use, some of which are brightly shining from the love that glows from within.

Yet the box that holds them altogether is The Spirit. It brings the disparate parts of our lives into a unity, and connects them