

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight O Lord, you who are rock, redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen. (Ps 19:14)**

Grace and Peace AND A Happy New Year be with you, dear Friends!

Three quick check-in questions: How is it with your soul? How did you let your light shine this week? How did your Star Word speak into your life? (There's a star word for you if you haven't received one...just let me know or contact the office)

Remember, each year we receive a word on a star... and that word speaks into our life as a gift from God. Keep it in a place you will see it each day and it will speak into your life. (My word is 'gentleness', and it has already helped me in lowering my stress as I drive.)

We are engaging in a series focused on **Gifts from God**.

The Star Word was an entry point.

Last week we focused on the Gift of Presence – God with us, Christ with us, Spirit with us... from the beginning and ever shall be. Both old and new testaments reflect this presence and promise.

Further, in this season of Light, after the Light of the World has come to reveal God's plan for saving the world, we are invited to 'let our light shine' so all may know that Love has come.

This is our calling as followers of Christ – to **BE** God's people and share the good news of love with others so that they, too, are transformed by God's love. We are to **BE** signs of God's Presence in our words and actions when we participate as a member of a particular faith community and its work by our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

All throughout scripture we hear how God calls ordinary, everyday people to something. In the Hebrew scriptures we know Abram & Sarai, Moses, Aaron, & Miriam, Isaiah, Deborah, Daniel; Esther, Nehemiah, Jonah, all

were called to do something for God. In the New Testament there are also examples of people being set apart, called to a particular role or ministry. Think of Mary, John the Baptist Jesus' disciples, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and Lydia.

Callings from God haven't stopped. Think of Mother Teresa (first a nun, then a teacher, then caring for the poorest of the poor'), Martin Luther King, Jr. (a preacher and then an advocate for equal rights through non-violence), C.S. Lewis (author *Mere Christianity* and influencer of JRR Tolkien), Clara Barton (served God by serving wounded soldiers), and Michelangelo ('I have been designated for this work by God').

Perhaps you've felt a call, as well.

Here's the thing: God promises not only to call us, but also to equip us to be able to do what is asked. One of the ways we are equipped is through Spiritual Gifts.

Today we begin with a text that is one of the primary passages that speak about spiritual gifts.

A spiritual gift is:

- a unique ability
- given by God
- through Holy Spirit
- to believers in Jesus
- for the purpose of bringing glory to God and strengthening God's church.<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley wrote Spiritual gifts flow 'from one fountain', the Holy Trinity<sup>2</sup>: the Holy 'Spirit', the 'Lord Jesus', and 'God' the Father (v4-6). These gifts are deployed under the guidance of the Spirit (v11).

So to be clear... Gifts are given to each of us to be used for ALL of us. The Scriptures that reference spiritual gifts do so in the context of a group. "Chosen people," "holy nation," "Body of Christ," "common good" are all

<sup>1</sup> Shirley Giles Davis. *God.Gifts.You.* 2018.39.

<sup>2</sup> Wesley, *Notes* 12:4.

plural terms that remind us that we belong to each other, and that gifts are to be used for others. Truly, our gifts are a way to steward what God has given to us. Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the spiritual gifts because the faithful were misusing their gifts as markers of status.

In addition, spiritual gifts are recognized and affirmed by the Body of Christ. We see them present in the life of Jesus and in the ministry of the early church.

The passage from John is an example. Weddings were a weeklong celebration in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. It frequently involved the whole village. Cana, a village within 9 miles of Nazareth, likely portrayed the value for hospitality in this occasion. So, to run out of wine would have brought shame on the host family.

Jesus' mother (Mary), Jesus, and his disciples are present. Jesus' mother points out the dilemma. Jesus responds, 'my hour has not yet come' (v4). His mother says to the servants, 'do whatever he tells you' (v5).

In this snapshot we can see portrayed the typical pattern surrounding gifts and the use of gifts (call, refusal, affirmation, obedience). Jesus' mother is keenly aware of Jesus' call to ministry. (He already has several followers.) She invites Jesus to act. Jesus has an opportunity to act on his gift of light, love and life...and he resists! Yet his mother affirms him when she speaks to the servants. Jesus acts (obeys).

Mary demonstrates faith in his call, his willingness to serve the 'common good' and maintain the honor of his friend. In theological terms, weddings and wine signify blessings of the messianic age (Isaiah 25:6). Jesus' first sign is about restoring life, abundance, and blessings of a new age in his ministry.

Have you spent time thinking on what God is calling you to do within the ministry of Saint James UMC? Have you thought about how your unique talents may serve the work of this faith community? Are you wondering about your Spiritual Gifts?

First, I will point you to a Spiritual Gifts Inventory that you can take from home if you have connectivity to internet. Look for this info in our weekly email. [GodGiftsYou.com – click on “Assessment” at the top of the page.]

Second, there are many persons who use their unique abilities for the purpose of bringing God glory and strengthening this church. Some have served for a while; some are serving for the first time. And there’s room for you to serve, too.

Let me acknowledge just a few of the servants of Saint James:

Edie Candee, Lay Leader      Donna Benson, Church Council Chair

Jelinda Blum, Nurture chair      Scott Mitchell, Trustees chair

Ann Moxley, SPRC      Sandy O’Toole, Worship

New roles added this year include:

Lauren Bresnock, Worship Tech Coordinator

Susan Williams, Bulletin Boards

And we are looking for a Web Servant (to update & maintain our website).

Andy Goldberg has been serving and needs to rotate out. Who will God send?

I’m not sure, but I trust God will provide. Please pray for help discerning your answer to this need.

Let us pray:

Friends, How will you shine your light this week because of this Word?

May it be so. So be it. Amen.

**Leading Into Prayer** Let us JOIN voices TOGETHER once again, to make room for the prayers for God’s people, church & world, As we sing: “We Are the Body of Christ” **TFWS 2227** ( *in the worship guide, or on the screen.*

**THE LITURGIST, Mary Anne Espenshade, will LEAD us in prayers for God’s people, church & World ...**