

PENTECOST,  
COMMONLY CALLED WHITSUNDAY

WHEN THE DAY OF PENTECOST HAD COME, THEY WERE ALL TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE. AND SUDDENLY FROM HEAVEN THERE CAME A SOUND LIKE THE RUSH OF A VIOLENT WIND, AND IT FILLED THE ENTIRE HOUSE WHERE THEY WERE SITTING. DIVIDED TONGUES, AS OF FIRE, APPEARED AMONG THEM, AND A TONGUE RESTED ON EACH OF THEM. ALL OF THEM WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BEGAN TO SPEAK IN OTHER LANGUAGES, AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM ABILITY.

PAUL'S IDEA IS TO STRESS THE ESSENTIAL UNITY OF THE CHURCH. THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST, AND THE CHARACTERISTIC OF A HEALTHY BODY IS THAT EVERY PART IN IT PERFORMS ITS OWN FUNCTION FOR THE GOOD OF THE WHOLE; BUT UNITY DOES NOT MEAN UNIFORMITY, AND THEREFORE WITHIN THE CHURCH THERE ARE DIFFERING GIFTS AND DIFFERING FUNCTIONS. BUT EVERY ONE OF THEM IS A GIFT OF THE SAME SPIRIT AND DESIGNED NOT FOR THE GLORY OF THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER OF THE CHURCH BUT FOR THE GOOD OF THE WHOLE.

PAUL BEGINS BY SAYING THAT ALL SPECIAL GIFTS COME FROM GOD, AND IT IS HIS BELIEF THAT THEY MUST, THEREFORE, BE USED IN GOD'S SERVICE. THE FAULT OF THE CHURCH IS THAT IT HAS SOMETIMES INTERPRETED THE IDEA OF SPECIAL GIFTS

FAR TOO NARROWLY. IT HAS TOO OFTEN ACTED ON THE APPARENT ASSUMPTION THAT THE SPECIAL GIFTS WHICH IT CAN USE CONSIST OF THINGS LIKE SPEAKING, PRAYING, TEACHING AND WRITING-THE MORE OR LESS INTELLECTUAL GIFTS. IT WOULD BE A VERY GOOD THING IF THE CHURCH WOULD REALIZE THAT THE GIFTS OF PEOPLE WHO CAN WORK WITH THEIR HANDS ARE JUST AS MUCH SPECIAL GIFTS FROM GOD. THE BUILDER, THE CARPENTER, THE ELECTRICIAN, THE PAINTER AND DECORATOR, THE ENGINEER, THE PLUMBER AND THE GARDENER ALL HAVE THEIR SPECIAL GIFTS, WHICH ARE FROM GOD AND CAN BE USED FOR HIM.

IT IS OF THE GREATEST INTEREST TO EXAMINE THE LIST OF SPECIAL GIFTS WHICH PAUL GIVES, BECAUSE FROM IT WE LEARN MUCH ABOUT THE CHARACTER AND WORK OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

HEAR THIS DANISH PROVERB:

“WHAT YOU ARE IS GOD’S GIFT TO YOU... WHAT YOU DO WITH YOURSELF IS YOUR GIFT TO GOD.”

FROM TODAY’S EPISTLE:

“NOW THERE ARE DIVERSITIES OF GIFTS BUT THE SAME SPIRIT.” THIS IS GOD SPEAKING THROUGH PAUL.

FROM RICK WARREN'S *THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE*: GOD DESERVES OUR BEST. HE CREATED US FOR A PURPOSE, AND HE EXPECTS US TO MAKE THE MOST OF WHAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN. HE DOESN'T WANT US TO WORRY ABOUT OR COVET ABILITIES WE DON'T HAVE. INSTEAD HE WANTS US TO FOCUS ON TALENTS HE HAS GIVEN TO YOU AND ME.

TO DO THIS WE MUST DISCOVER OUR GIFTS AND LEARN TO ACCEPT AND ENJOY THEM AND THEN DEVELOP THEM TO OUR FULLEST POTENTIAL.

THE BIBLE SAYS, "*DON'T ACT THOUGHTLESSLY... TRY TO SEEK AND DO WHATEVER THE LORD WANTS US TO DO.*" DON'T LET ANOTHER DAY GO BY. START FINDING OUT AND CLARIFYING WHAT GOD INTENDS FOR US TO BE AND DO.

WE BEGIN BY ASSESSING OUR GIFTS. TAKE A LONG HONEST LOOK AT WHAT WE ARE GOOD AT AND WHERE WE ARE NOT SO GOOD. PAUL ADVISED, "*TRY TO HAVE A SOLID ESTIMATE OF OUR CAPABILITIES.*" MAKE A LIST. WE ARE SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH, NOT FISHING FOR A COMPLIMENT. IF WE THINK WE ARE GIFTED TO BE A TEACHER OR A SINGER... DO IT!

PAUL SAID, “*THE BEST WAY TO DISCOVER OUR GIFTS AND ABILITIES IS TO EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT AREAS OF SERVICE.*” IT IS ONLY AFTER WE BEGIN ACCEPTING OPPORTUNITIES, THAT WE SEE THE RESULTS, RECEIVE CONFIRMATION AND REALIZE, “GOD GIFTED ME TO DO THIS!”

SOME BOOKS GET THE DISCOVERY PROCESS BACKWARD. AUTHOR AND THEOLOGIAN MARCUS BORG SAYS, “*DISCOVER YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT AND THEN YOU’LL KNOW WHAT MINISTRY YOU’RE SUPPOSED TO HAVE.*” IT ACTUALLY WORKS THE EXACT OPPOSITE WAY. BISHOP DESMOND TUTU REMINDS US TO “*JUST START SERVING, EXPERIMENTING WITH DIFFERENT MINISTRIES AND THEN WE’LL DISCOVER OUR GIFTS.*” UNTIL ONE IS ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN SERVING, WE’RE NOT GOING TO KNOW OUR SKILLS.

FRIENDS MAY SAY, “*YOU ACTUALLY HAVE DOZENS OF HIDDEN ABILITIES AND GIFTS WE DON’T KNOW BECAUSE WE’VE NEVER TRIED THEM OUT.*” SO WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO TRY DOING SOME THINGS WE’VE NEVER DONE BEFORE. NO MATTER HOW OLD WE ARE, GOD URGES US TO NEVER STOP EXPERIMENTING. MANY PEOPLE HAVE DISCOVERED HIDDEN TALENTS IN THEIR SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES AND BEYOND. TRY TEACHING OR LEADING OR ORGANIZING OR PLAYING AN INSTRUMENT OR WORKING WITH TEENAGERS. WE WILL NEVER KNOW WHAT WE’RE GOOD AT UNTIL

WE TRY. WHEN IT DOESN'T WORK OUT, CALL IT AN "EXPERIMENT," NOT A FAILURE. WE WILL EVENTUALLY LEARN WHERE WE ARE GOOD.

PAUL ADVISES, "*MAKE A CAREFUL EXPLORATION OF WHO YOU ARE AND THE WORK YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN, AND THEN PUT YOURSELF INTO THAT.*" AGAIN, IT HELPS TO GET FEEDBACK FROM THOSE WHOM KNOW YOU BEST. ASK QUESTIONS: WHAT DO I REALLY ENJOY DOING MOST?

PART OF ACCEPTING OUR GIFTS IS RECOGNIZING OUR LIMITATIONS. FEW ARE GOOD AT EVERYTHING, AND NO ONE IS CALLED TO BE EVERYTHING. PAUL UNDERSTOOD THAT HIS CALLING WAS NOT TO ACCOMPLISH EVERYTHING OR PLEASE EVERYONE BUT TO FOCUS ONLY ON THE PARTICULAR MINISTRY GOD HAS SHAPED FOR US. HE SAID, "*OUR GOAL IS TO STAY WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF GOD'S PLAN FOR US.*" WHEN WE TRY TO OVEREXTEND OUR MINISTRY, REACH BEYOND WHAT GOD SHAPED US FOR, WE CAN EXPERIENCE STRESS. JUST AS EACH RUNNER IN A RACE IS GIVEN A DIFFERENT LANE TO RUN IN, WE MUST INDIVIDUALLY "*RUN WITH PATIENCE THE PARTICULAR RACE THAT GOD HAS SET BEFORE US.*" GOD WANTS US TO ENJOY USING THE GIFTS HE HAS GIVEN YOU AND ME.

PAUL CONTINUES, EXAMINE YOUR EXPERIENCES AND EXTRACT THE LESSONS YOU HAVE LEARNED. REVIEW YOUR LIFE AND THINK ABOUT HOW IT HAS SHAPED YOU.

MOSES TOLD THE ISRAELITES, *“REMEMBER TODAY WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THE LORD THROUGH YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH HIM.”* SELF EVALUATION; THAT’S A GOOD REASON TO KEEP A SPIRITUAL JOURNAL. PAUL WORRIED THAT THE BELIEVERS IN GALATIA WOULD WASTE THE PAIN THEY HAD BEEN THROUGH. HE SAID, *“WERE ALL YOUR EXPERIENCES WASTED? I HOPE NOT!”*

WE WILL FIND THAT PEOPLE WHO DO NOT UNDERSTAND OUR COMMITMENT FOR MINISTRY WILL CRITICIZE US AND TRY TO MAKE US CONFORM TO WHAT THEY THINK WE SHOULD BE DOING. PAUL OFTEN HAD TO DEAL WITH CRITICS WHO MISUNDERSTOOD AND MALIGNED HIS SERVICE. HIS RESPONSE WAS ALWAYS THE SAME: AVOID COMPARISONS, RESIST EXAGGERATIONS, AND SEEK ONLY GOD’S DIRECTION.

WE ARE TO CULTIVATE OUR GIFTS AND ABILITIES, GROW OUR CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY, AND BROADEN OUR EXPERIENCES SO WE WILL BE INCREASINGLY MORE EFFECTIVE IN OUR SERVICE. PAUL TOLD THE PHILIPPIANS TO *“KEEP ON GROWING IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING,”* AND HE REMINDED TIMOTHY, *“KINDLE AFRESH THE GIFT OF GOD WHICH IS IN YOU.”*

GOD WILL ALWAYS BE WITH US AND IF WE ALLOW HIM TO GUIDE US, WE ARE ABLE TO USE THE GIFTS WE ARE GIVEN. WE ONLY LOSE THEM IF THEY ARE IGNORED.

IF WE DON'T UTILIZE THE ABILITIES AND SKILLS GOD HAS GIVEN US, WE WILL LOSE THEM. JESUS TAUGHT THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS TO EMPHASIZE THIS TRUTH. FAIL TO USE WHAT YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN AND YOU'LL LOSE IT. USE THE ABILITY YOU'VE GOT AND GOD WILL INCREASE IT. PAUL TOLD TIMOTHY, *"BE SURE TO USE THE ABILITIES GOD HAS GIVEN YOU...PUT THESE ABILITIES TO WORK."*

WHATEVER GIFTS WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN CAN BE ENLARGED AND DEVELOPED THROUGH PRACTICE. FOR INSTANCE, ONE GETS THE GIFT OF TEACHING FULLY WHEN IT IS DEVELOPED. BUT WITH STUDY, FEEDBACK, AND PRACTICE, A "GOOD TEACHER" CAN BECOME A BETTER TEACHER, AND WITH TIME, GROW TO BE A MASTER TEACHER. DON'T SETTLE FOR A HALF-DEVELOPED GIFT. STRETCH AND LEARN ALL WE CAN. *"CONCENTRATE ON DOING OUR BEST FOR GOD, WORK WE WON'T BE ASHAMED OF."* TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY TRAINING OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP YOUR SHAPE AND SHARPEN YOUR SERVING SKILLS.

GOD WANTS US TO CONTINUE TO GROW INTO HIS SERVICE.