

**Sunday, June 8, 2014**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon: "Receive, Just Receive"**

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*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

In the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts, Paul attributes this saying to Jesus –

“In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

There is no biblical record of Jesus actually saying this, but as John’s gospel points out – “there are many things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

So, *It is more blessed to give than to receive* is one of the very basic cultural values that we are taught from childhood.

A value that has perhaps precluded us from the joy of receiving.

In both of our readings this morning we are told that the gifts of the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers, without warning, without any inquiries about who might be comfortable receiving these gifts.

Paul, writing to the Corinthians says, “It is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. “

Again, no choice about participating,

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

I love that line.

It says to me that each and everyone of us has received some sort of gift – unbidden – from our Creator – a gift that we are to use for the common good.

What is your gift? Wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, ability to speak or understand different languages?

If we allow ourselves to acknowledge that everyone has a different gift, a different perspective we could then open our hearts and minds to embrace those differences.

If we truly learn to value the gifts of others, it frees us from the weight of judgment and righteousness.

Just think, if each one of our different gifts was publicly identified and lauded, no decisions would be made unless everyone had a chance to voice their position.

There would be no tyranny or bigotry if everyone saw themselves as part of a whole.

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.”

So it is with Christ!

It is hard to dwell in self importance when you recognize that you are just a part of something much bigger than yourself.

With Christ, we come to understand that our gifts are not meant simply for our own self-aggrandizement, but rather to be used for the common good.

The Day of Pentecost marks the shift in the Church Calendar from God's Story to Our Story.

After the months of remembering and entering into the grand narrative of God's saving work, we now begin to explore the implications for us, and how we can become participants in the Reign of God.

The key moment of transition is this outpouring of God's Spirit.

In keeping with the biblical principle of "passing the mantle" from prophet to disciple, Pentecost is the moment in which Jesus "passes the mantle" on to us.

We have learned from Jesus what God's mission is, and now we have received his Spirit in order to continue his work.

So, Pentecost is a gift received, but it is also a preparation, an empowering, for the work ahead.

As we seek to follow Christ in this world, we will face many challenges that are beyond our ability to overcome.

We will encounter many people whom we would not naturally be able to love.

We will confront many aspects of ourselves that we would rather deny than heal.

But, we do not have to deal with these issues alone.

The gift of the Spirit empowers us to find creative solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems.

The Spirit fills us with the love of Christ and enables us to reach out even to our enemies.

And the Spirit reveals what needs to change in us, and brings God's healing and transforming grace into our hearts and lives.

What an amazing gift this is!

In order to share our own gifts, we must be willing to receive the gifts of others.

This is where our cultural inclination to give rather than receive causes a bit of a challenge – making us feel a bit awkward when someone wants to bestow a gift or offer help.

For the past few years Theresa Carroll and I have been in dialogue about this paradox.

We decided to share our experience with you today as a way of promoting the joy of receiving.

In the Fall of 2011, my first year here, Theresa came to me to tell me she had been diagnosed with cancer.

I knew Theresa from the Search Committee that had called me, as well as the Board of Deacons on which she served.

Theresa and I talked about how the church might help her and her family cope with the challenges that lay ahead.

We agreed that this was new territory for both of us and that we would accompany one another on the journey, remaining open to where the Spirit might lead.

Now, almost three years later, I must tell you that I learned more on that journey than I could have ever imagined.

I learned that this community is extraordinarily generous.

I learned that the best in people emerges in the face of a family in crisis.

I learned that prayer has the power to change lives – both the prayer and the prayee!

I learned that sometimes people who spend a lifetime giving may find themselves in a position to receive – and that is hard.

I learned that God's grace has the most amazing power to bring people into relationship with people you might never have imagined knowing.

I learned to trust that the Holy Spirit works among us, between us and within us to generate change for the common good.

I learned that to be the Body of Christ in this world each part must care, deeply, for the other parts.

Today, I celebrate the gifts that Theresa has brought to this congregation and I express my profound gratitude to God for the way God's holy spirit has manifested itself here.

Theresa has agreed to share her insights with us this morning.

Welcome.

*(Theresa speaks)(See link on Sermon page of the website.)*

Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, God of Spirit – breathe upon us this day and fill us with gifts that we might share with our neighbors.

Help us to understand that each individual has something to share.

Let us open our hearts to be gracious recipients of the gifts we are offered.

We long to be part of a community – to celebrate our connection to one another.

Help us to provide companionship on our various journeys – learning from each other, embracing our differences.

O God, let the Spirit abide in us that we might shed your light of grace throughout the world.

Hear our prayers this day for those whom we love.

We pray for those who are sick, that they might be healed.

For those who mourn, we pray for comfort.

For our brothers and sisters throughout the world who live in poverty or pain we pray that they might feel your holy presence.

Today, we celebrate all the graduates in the class of 2014.

May new beginnings and bright futures be theirs.

We are grateful, God, for our own lives and the blessings that they represent.

Hear us now, as we turn to you in silence, with the prayers of our hearts....

*Silence*

Jesus taught us to pray together as a community of faith with these words...Our Father