

Calvary United Methodist Church
August 19, 2018

GIFTED PEOPLE
Rev. Dr. Robert Cook

Children's Message:

I'll ask our kids to come forward and we'll share our time with our kids. So, how are you guys today? (Good!) I'm glad. Did you wish your grandma and grandpa a happy anniversary this week? You didn't know about that? It was 1976. It was a very good year. I got them by a week, my wife and I. Happy Anniversary! (Thank you.)

Well, the church has a lot of power, but the power is resonant in each person. It doesn't come from the pastors. The church isn't the most important thing because of its pastors, but because of you. Each of you has a gift, did you know that? You have gifts in you that you have to discover.

When I was 20 years old, the last thing I was thinking of is, "You know, I think I'd like to go into the ministry." I never thought about that, but I was listening to a sermon by our assistant pastor and he was preaching guilt all over the place and I remember saying, "You know, if I ever preached, I wouldn't want to preach guilt." Then I thought, "Well, that's a funny thought, if I ever preached." Didn't know that was my gift, but there you go. But who knows what you'll be, what you'll do. In time someone might say, "Now, you are going to be the administrative board chair," or they are going to say, "You are going to be the pastor." They are going to say, "Now, we have someone who has amazing gifts of teaching and when kids listen to her, they don't miss a single word." Do you think that would happen? It would be amazing, right? It would be.

Well, I can demonstrate how it works with this bottle of club soda, right? You can feel...do you want to feel the bottle of club soda? It has (It almost looks like water.) It is pretty much carbonated water. Yeah, come on in, come closer. (I want to taste it.) Well, I'll let you have it if you want after the end of the service or at the end of this little children's sermon here.

See, there is a lot of pressure in here. Now, there's a verse in the Bible that says: stir up the gift that's in you. If you have a gift, you have to stir it up. Just like this. (Don't open it!) Do you think I would do that? Do you think I would? How many of you think I would? Don't put it in your direction? Well, you see, there's all this power here and how are you going to let it out, right? I mean you gotta stir it up and then it has to come out because it is just like everybody here including you, you have great gifts, but they have to come out somehow. Just like that. (OH!!!) Now you can try some!

Yeah, I brought some tissues, paper towels. Anybody need any? But you see, when you do this, the church has this explosive power that you've let go. When you let it out...now to be

truthful with you, when I opened it wasn't it a lot more fun? (Yes.) Didn't you think it was a lot more fun when I opened it? You went back there, huh?

When the church lets all of its gifts flow. It's just a whole lot more fun. And you know what? There's a lot more room for fun in church.

So, let's pray: Lord, let these gifts out in our kids and each of us. Use us for your glory. And maybe the church can be a whole lot more fun if you'll do that. In Christ's name. Amen.

Ok, well, thank you so much. (That was really crazy.) It was, wasn't it? (Loved it!) Take one because I'm running a little close there. (I want one for my dad.) You want one for your dad? (Yeah, and my mom.) Ok.

Message:

Ephesians 4:1-16

Will you join me in a word of prayer? Spirit of God, come upon us today and speak to our hearts. Move deeply upon us that we may hear from You and understand the way that you are at work in us both the will and to do of your good pleasure. Release the gifts you have given to us that we truly may be your church. I pray that the words of my mouth, the meditation of our hearts will be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

You may have heard that, Elon Musk, who is making the Tesla cars, wants to buy back all the shares of the publically held company there and he is willing to pay \$420 per share. Now, probably going to run in to some problems with that because he wants to buy it back. -But, that's nothing because Pastor Jeff and I want to give this Church away!

That's right! We really want to give this church away. Actually, what we want to do is give it back to you! Because it's your Church! And this text from the 4th chapter of Ephesians tells us exactly how to do it.

Now, why do we want to give the church away? This is something we should hold onto, right? Paul's Letter to the Christians at Ephesus is an open-ended dialogue. They are making the path as they are going. No one has done this before. Paul is using his background in the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call our Old Testament. He's using the discoveries of the teachings of Jesus, his prayer relationship with the Lord as the Spirit leads him and he's making a pathway for these brand-new Christians to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. There were no manuals, there were no publishing companies, there was no Sunday School material, there was no Sunday School, there was experience like this ever before. And he's teaching them how to follow Jesus.

Now, to follow Jesus is to go against the grain of human nature. Because, people are born with a nature that tends toward the selfish, towards self-serving and the self-centered, towards the greedy and aggressive. Those of you who are parents know you hold that tiny little baby and about 10 or 11 months they say that first word. What's the first word? No. I probably didn't

do that. Neither did you, right? It's other people. Right. Our knowledge is partial but we tend to think we know it all and so we misunderstand. Our egos can easily get bruised, they get easily out of control. We hurt others; we're hurt by others; we shut people down, we turn others off. And never forget that we human beings have an enormous capacity for violence and for murder and we see this every day.

Now, Jesus, who is one of us and one with us in this human life, is made differently. But his heart is one with God. And more than anything else, what he wants is what God wants for this human race—people made in the image of God. He listens, he understands, he's compassionate. The Spirit gives him the knowledge that's necessary. If he gets angry, which occasionally he does. He's angry against injustice. And yet he forbears all people and does no harm, not even to those who slapped and beat and tortured him.

He entered our world as God's servant. He washed the feet of his friends. He confronted evil, the evil behind our sin and failings. He took evil on without resorting to the tricks that evil always does and the violence that it engenders. Instead, he bore it for us; he bore the cross for us in love. What we did then was we made him our scapegoat. There are a whole bunch of PowerPoint slides on there, so you are going to have to figure them out because I don't have the clicker. But you'll see one with a lamb and that's probably where we are. I'm really bad at PowerPoint. You probably thought that, "This guy's not good at PowerPoint." Jeff's got that clicker going all the time. Well, I'm bad at it. So, we made him our scapegoat.

What we did to Jesus what we do to all who are like him: we killed him. But God raised him from the dead. I believe this. I believe this because God raised him from the dead to reverse the human sentence of death on him. And in the mystery of the resurrection, evil receives a powerful defeat, that Jesus accomplishes a victory over sin, evil and the power of death.

Now that first night of the resurrection night he doesn't come back from his disciples and say, "My turn." He doesn't. He goes through the locked doors, the barred windows and he shows his wounds, these wounds that he bore in love. And he forgives them. And then he does the most amazing thing: he breathes his Spirit into them and gives them the Spirit and they became the first fruits of a new kind of human being—a new creation.

And he spent the next 40 days appearing, teaching them what it means to be live into this new creation which no one had ever done before. And, he puts his Spirit upon the Pentecost; and not only to that band of men and women, but to the whole earth so it is without bounds, so that the Church which is literally his body, his physical presence to the world, the church is born. The Church is to be Christ to the world to continue his work, to share his grace and embody his love, to share the acceptance and forgiveness and mercy that a broken world needs.

He gave himself away in trust to God for you and for me for the sake of our world. And he asks all of us who follow him and call him Lord, to give themselves away as he did, trusting God to use our lives for His good purposes.

Paul understands this and so he asks his readers in this letter to the Ephesians to step up and live into the new creation which he understands is not common to their nature. It is something beyond them and they will need the Spirit's help to do this. And he says no longer are we to react to those around with anger, malice, double-dealing and violence. We are to allow the Holy Spirit to direct, control and suggest how we live, and work, and serve, and act in this world. There is to be less of our ego and more of Christ's Spirit in us. This was the statement of John the Baptist when he saw Jesus coming into his own and he says, "I must decrease that he might increase." That's how we do it. And then we are able to be in unity of heart and purpose with everyone else in the Body of Christ, that one comes way later, because we can be the Body of Christ, to continue Jesus' work of healing and restoration in our world. I guess I'm going to have to brush up on that PowerPoint thing. Unless you guys are doing this to force my hand.

Paul asks of his readers, which is us, to be like Jesus to one another because we're members of one body, sharing one faith, one baptism, one hope in our one Shared Lord who has come to us through God—our Shared Creator. To be Christ to one another.

Now, you know when person bears sickness in their body, one part is warring against another and it cannot function. We call it dysfunction, right? Our unity in Jesus heals the dysfunction in the Body of Christ. And while each part has its unique function, it has to work together in a harmony of wholeness and health. And then it becomes a thing of beauty. And that's what Jesus desires for the Church to be...a thing of beauty.

So some years ago I was on a mission trip in Uruguay, it was my first. And we had an amazing two weeks there. On our final evening, the Church we worked at threw a fiesta for us. It was wonderful. The food was amazing. People came from all over the community not just the church, which was a pretty small congregation. And they held this wonderful fiesta, great music. People were singing these amazing songs. I was really trying to learn my Spanish. But then what they had for us, they cleared the floor and a couple came, a husband and wife couple, to dance the Tango. Now, you've seen the Tango, how many of you have seen the Tango? You think it's pretty sexy, right? It's more than that. That's the not really understand it. Well, the Tango, properly in Spanish. So whatever you know here of the Tango was nothing like its proper environment. The couple who danced did this so beautifully and so well. You saw the call and response. You saw how they worked together with one another, where it just became one of these two people, just one person acting together in this amazing...it really took my breath away. I never saw anything like it before. It was just glorious to see these two people do this wonderful dance and they didn't do it for pay, because it was their gift to us in gratitude for what we had done. And that gift inspired. We loved those people so we went back a whole bunch more times and I'd love to go back next year if anybody is interested. Jeff has been there and we actually worked at some of the same places, but at different times together, but it just keeps on giving.

Now Paul also in this chapter speaks of Jesus' descent to evil and freeing those in captive and

ascending to God's presence as great victory. A victor receives the spoils of war. Some of you have had the GI Bill which was begun after WWII. That was the spoils of war. And what that was was a brilliant idea to educate these young men and women through the GI Bill, or you can see houses that were built in that era, just as this church was being founded. And it continued to give and give and give as those young men and women were educated and gave back to the community and gave back to the whole world, it was an era unlike any other. Well, Jesus gives us gifts and gives each follower a gift uniquely adjusted to them so that as he works in you, grace, more mercy, more healing, more transformation, new life happens in this broken world. Because every Christian, all of you, are gifted for your service in the body of Christ.

Now, the truth of this is, neither Jesus nor Paul ever planned for a centralized professional clergy to do all the work of ministry. And Paul references that. Ministry does not happen up here. Ministry happens in your life when you go to work tomorrow, when you are in Walmart tomorrow, when you are driving tomorrow or today, when you are caring and sharing and doing all kinds of things in your normal everyday life that those who do the work of apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, pastors so forth, they are to build up as the body of Christ because the church is your church. It is your church. And the work of ministry belongs to you and you are called to do your part in sharing Christ's good news. It is your church. Pastors come and go. You just had a pastoral transition, me too. Pastors come and go, but you remain because you are the body of Christ here. And if each one of you has a gift unique to you as a gift, then your part is to give that away as Jesus leads you so that you are sharing in the work of healing the creation.

Now, here's something amazing: when you give yourself to God you are blessed all the more. And there is something I learned long ago: As you give to God, you can't out-give God. God gives you yet more.

So, Pastor Jeff and I want to give the Church away, back to you because it's your church. And our part then is to teach, to preach, to share, to care, to guide you to release those gifts, just like shaking up that bottle of club soda. Some of you should have come in a little closer. It would have been a lot more fun, right? Then, ok. As you discover your gifts and you exercise your gifts and you will continue to grow in the love and knowledge of Jesus, and you'll be able to give that away, and the ministry that you have will be used of Jesus to accomplish more than you can imagine.

You see, the movement of Jesus moves through us and you've received it from others. You didn't get it from a building, you may have found a lot of that in a building, but the church itself is not a building. It is you, a living organism, pulsating with life, made up of us and so many around this world some who have come to our shores here, some who have come and will discover that Christ is calling them as you share your gift in love, because you truly are a gifted people!

So, as pastors, Jeff and I want to be there for you to give ourselves away to help you grow and

do God's calling you to do both in both here and through Calvary Church, because, here's the mantra: it's your Church! Whose church is it? (Ours.) It is. And then, you can use all of the gifts and all the graces and all those amazing things you have to give this church away to those who do not yet know the redemption of Jesus! Amen.