

Calvary United Methodist Church
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SPIRITUALLY GIFTED

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Children's Message:

Isaiah 62:1

I invite our children to come forward this morning. Good morning! I thought maybe it would be icy this morning and I was so happy this morning that the roads were pretty bear and it's not so icy out, so we are able to be here in this house and celebrate God's presence with us this morning. (Child speaks.) That's right. We'll be a lot safer.

This morning I want to read a passage of scripture to you telling us about how we praise God for all that we have and how they were good telling stories. Are any of you story tellers? I bet some of you tell stories. When you do something fun do you go tell everybody else all about it? Then we are story tellers of sorts.

Well, listen to these words of God: Because I love Jerusalem, I will continue to speak for her. For Jerusalem's sake I will not stop speaking. I will speak until her goodness shines like a bright light. I will speak until her salvation burns bright like a flame.

Now, we just a few weeks ago had a celebration. It's history lesson again. What did we just celebrate? Jesus' birth, Christmas, which is a celebration. And there is a song that we sing usually some time in those times. It is called *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. Do you know that? So, what do we go and tell? That Jesus Christ is born! What difference does he make? Why do we tell the story about him? (He will forgive our sins.) He forgives us of our sins. Others? (Child speaks.) He died on the cross for our sins. You know, you all are going to be great preachers. I am so glad you know these things.

And along with that he promised to love his Heavenly Father and he promised to love and care for one another. So, what do we tell everybody? You have to meet this guy! The best person I've ever learned about. He teaches us to love. He loves us so much that he laid down his life for us. And so when we ask why in the world we keep telling the story, he said, "I tell all of Jerusalem until all of the world knows of your glory, so everyone shines." Do you think everyone is shining yet? No, because when there is evil in the world and there is sadness and there is darkness and people do bad things, some haven't learned just quite enough about God yet because when God fills us, we don't want to hurt other people. When God fills us, we not only remember that he died on the cross for us and forgave us of our sins, he taught us to love everybody. And it's a great lesson.

When Jesus was here on earth he would meet with disciples and then he met with groups of hundreds, groups of thousands, and sometimes with individuals. He was always telling the story, always telling a story and so it is that you know when you hear a story you shout it out to

everybody, right? I bet you have stories.

Did any of you make gingerbread houses over the holiday? A couple of you did. I've never made one, but it looks like fun and when you made them and finish it up, do you go tell everyone: Mom/Dad/whatever, come and see what I made. Do you do that? You are pretty excited about it, right? And so you go and you tell everybody.

Now many of you went outside yesterday to slip and slide a little bit? (Child speaks.) You did? I slipped without sleighing, how about that? So, when you go out there and make your little snow angels, do you go out and say: Oh, that was so much fun. Do you tell the stories?

It's very seldom that we can be quiet about things we are happy about. We go out and we tell the story. How many of you have ever had a birthday party? I bet everyone has had birthday parties, right? And do your friends and family come? And are you excited? And do you tell everyone: I had a wonderful party? Christmas is Jesus' birthday party, so it is that we go out and we tell everybody about his love and he says in that scripture that we are going to keep telling that story about his love, about Christmas, about forgiveness of our sins until all the world knows it.

"I am the light of the world." Jesus said he's the light, but guess what? He lives through you and you and you. We are the light for Jesus Christ today. And I love this, he says: I love you, do you love me? What should our answer be? (Yes!) Yes, of course. I even found a little test and I like this: Do you love me? A. yes. What if it's B? Look back to A and it's yes and if it's C look to B, yes.

We love God because He has given us the power to be light. When you are in a little room and it's all dark and you light a little candle, it brightens it up. So you might think: I am only one person, right? Sometimes we think that, I can't make a difference. God says: Well, I gotta tell you this. When you are the light, the whole world opens up and you brighten the world. And we tell that story. The scripture says we keep telling that story until all the world knows His light.

So we have a big job. You have a job. Everybody here has a job: to be the light of Christ for other people.

I thank you for coming up and I pray God will fill you with His light. And ask you to be safe and blessed throughout the week. And you may take a snack on your way out. Thanks for come up.

Message:

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Spiritually gifted. Sometimes we always question well, what is it that I am to do? I would like to believe that the Spirit of God comes to us just as much as the fingerprint on our fingers. We are, each one, gifted in specific ways. And from time to time we look at one another

er and say: Boy, I wish I had their gifts. And at the same time someone is looking at you and saying: Gee, I wish I had their gifts. God doesn't distinguish and we shouldn't be thinking that we are higher or lower than anyone else because we are an instrument of God's peace. We are a gift from Almighty God. I would like you to be able to think that every morning when you look in the mirror and say: I'm a gift from God and I will touch this world in some way with whatever God has given me to make the difference with what all that I have, all that I am. I am God's gift to the world.

When I was younger I used to always go out and watch the stars and specifically at this time of year in February and March I always think if I am up in the mountains away from light pollution it appears you can see almost every star in the heavens and with all these lights you might not see them as well. You can see all those different kinds of constellations and it's just sort of amazing how God has a plan to see it all.

When I was younger my sisters, I remember them playing the song *The Age of Aquarius* and they were into all that kind of stuff that we sort of as the church in earlier years talked back about all these signs. Remember? I don't know. I'm a Sagittarius and it would tell me all about me. We'd get upset and there was a time we would liken it to satanic powers, but the reality of it is, God controls the universe. That's why sailors, before we had technology of today and stuff, they could read the stars and know exactly where they were in the oceans. So, there are some parts of that that might have some truth in it.

But the ultimate path about what leads our life and puts us on a path of life comes from Almighty God. God himself says: I'm the One who will make a pathway for you and I will light the path. Now some ways on my path I have tripped along the way. Have you ever been on a hike at night? And if a light is not there you take a few stumbles. And there are times we choose, because we are not looking to God and we are doing our own thing and life becomes a stony walk from time to time. I've made a lot of those booboos, because I was thinking more about my desires than His. And truly even when I am trying to follow God, sometimes it appears there are stumbling blocks. And so God is saying: Do not be discouraged. I am the light of your path. I am the one who will make the way. But understand this: I am God and you are the one who worships me.

All throughout the scriptures there are records of those who wanted to be like God. Until I started preparing this, I forgot about a man named Nimrod. Now that's a name that we don't name many children today, isn't it? Nimrod was the great-great-grandson of someone you knew, Noah. And Noah's son Hamm had a son Cush and Cush was the father of Nimrod. And Nimrod got tired of the people of faith and he says: Enough of this. I think we can build a tower and call it the Tower of Babel, to get to the heavens so we can see God and be like God. It's in Genesis 10 if you'd like to read the story.

God doesn't want us to be like God, God wants us to be ourselves and He wants us not again to be like God, but to be a reflection, to be the light of God, to be the light of Christ. So,

when there are people who need light in their darkness they can look to us and say: I know you are not perfect either, but it seems you have a journey. There is a faith about you, there is a security about you, there is a trust about you that you have. Can you tell me about that? And that's God speaking through us, using us as an instrument of His peace. We're not like God, but we are a reflection of Jesus Christ.

It's difficult, for me anyway, to understand God's will. There are so many parts of life and culture when I go around here and in my own family, I'm thinking: why does one seem to suffer and one not? Why do some people seem to be lifted up and others are not. Why is it that some people struggle so much? And sometimes I have been one of those people, right? We've all been there on that path. And God said we will only understand when we are fully meeting God on that day on the other side and we will have a better understanding of the Kingdom.

There is a place for all of us and that place is finding out what part am I in His Kingdom? When we find that part, we'll be the happiest people alive because we always say this when people say do you love what you do? I say: Yes, I love what I do. Then it's never a day of work, is it? When you love what you are doing, and when you love what you are doing for God and you love what you are doing in your family, yes, it can be tedious and it can be exhausting, you know, working and cleaning and cooking and maintaining a family and caring for children, going to work every day, that can be exhausting, but it's not literally draining because you know you are exactly where God wants you. And if you are not, then you need to start searching.

The searching come about when you look at the gifts and there are gifts and talents. They are a little bit different. Talents is typically what we can use. Some people are born with those mathematical things, born with a lot of those things we say I wish I had that. Well, I'm thankful for what I have. Math and science isn't one of them.

So, some of those talents enable us to provide for our families. We've taken them, we've honed them, we've polished them, we've matured them, we've practiced them, but the Spiritual gifts and those things that we use for God's Glories. You can use your talents for God's glory, but there are other things, the faith that we profess, the security, those who have the gift of prayer, prayer-warriors and those who are healers and those...as you read through the scriptures there are many things you determine are your spiritual gifts that you have to give. And if you are here today, if you are breathing today, you have gifts. And one of the saddest things always if that we don't always get them plugged in. Can you imagine having a light at home and it doesn't work for days and you finally look down and it wasn't plugged in? If you don't have power, you aren't going to have light. And some of us today wonder why we don't have more power with what we have and why we can't change. We are not plugged in to God, we are not connecting to God and when we connect with God we have to connect with others. And we discover what our gifts are, I believe, in prayer. I'm talking big prayer and daily prayer.

Our gifts can change as we mature, as we have more experiences. When I was a young man and people would come to me and be depressed, I would simply say: God is so good. Just pick yourself up. Life is good. And then twenty-five years later I had an episode of depression. It's like, Good Lord, how do you get up in the morning? How do you go to work? How can you face other people? How can you function? All of a sudden my sensitivity level for people who experience depression was a whole new thing.

I have probably celebrated 300 funerals in my life, which are difficult. They hurt me when I see other hurts, and then I buried my father. Gulp. It's a whole different experience. When you experience what other people experience, we mature. And so we pray: God, what is it? And as we pray, God says: Please, you can't just pray, you have to listen. Listen to the voice of others around you. You know others can tell you sometimes: You are so good at this. Spouses, children, others: You've always been there for me. You've been caring, been the one who has delivered. Those people who are always there for the neighbors and friends. Wow! What a gift. The gift of presence, of just being there. We underestimate the power of these gifts.

I shared earlier, in March my sister's husband, my brother-in-law George, fell and was paralyzed from his neck down. I called her last night to see how she is doing. These four little Mennonite children next door, she says, they came over twice and shoveled all my sidewalks. They cleaned out their carport so she can put her car in there. You think it is not good just to be a servant neighbor? Let me tell you, if you weren't there for people who have no one else, their world would collapse.

Have you ever been in a place where your world would collapse? Then you know what it is to be seeking your gift from God to say: God, what is it? And God says: All I ask of you is to be open and to be available. I will speak to you at the right time and you will know when you have to pick up that person who looks like they are broken, when you have to give someone ten dollars for their gas because they are broken down. You will know someone needs to go for their chemotherapy. You'll know someone just needs to pray for them, someone just needs to sit and be absolutely quiet, the gift of presence. When you are open and available and you say to God: Lord. When I pray here Sunday afternoons or mornings, I am saying: Lord, I am yours, all of me. All of me. My time, my talents, my gifts, my service, all that I have Lord. When we offer that to God...In confession, sometimes I take it back and do my own thing. But God says: When you are open to me and available to me, I will make a way because you'll hear.

I want to tell you a little how this started for me. When I was a young boy, I grew up in the church. But you can't just inherit faith. Sometimes it has to be your faith. And my pastor took a group of us, this wasn't us, there was like eight. I grew up in a small church. Eight of our youth, and he packed us up with an equal amount of adults and we went out to Taos, New Mexico and we led a Bible school. It was there I started to sense a calling for ministry. And

the next year we started working for the elderly in our community, doing building, which was what I thought my call in life was, being a contractor, because everything I did in school was learning to frame before air-hammers, learning concrete work, learning to weld, learning to do everything about building. And in that process, I kept saying when I felt this nudge: I can't be a pastor. I don't have college preparation. When I started at Penn State, I had to take a full semester to get me up to college level because I kept saying I can't and God keep saying: You can.

Because, do you remember a man named Moses? When you start to think you can't, I want you to read through the Bible of the hundreds, hear that, hundreds of people who said I can't to God and God said: Oh, yes you can! Moses didn't want to be a leader, he didn't want to speak. He said: Take my brother, he is more eloquent. And God said: I'm taking you. And he led the people out of slavery, out of Egypt into new life or we wouldn't have the story we are today. He used the woman at the well who was cast out by others to go and tell the story. A man who knew everything about her and took time for her. He used those who were handicapped and those who were blind. He used the prostitutes. He used everybody that would listen and be available. So if you think you are not available or not good enough or not equipped, think of this. God says: I will give you everything you need because I will not only prepare you, but I will pave the road. You've heard that line before. God says: I will provide and prepare a way for you because, he says, I'm the God of making life changers.

When we read through the scriptures there are one man and one woman at a time changing lives and God says to you: We, say this with me: We are life changes. (We are life changers.) Amen. Take that to the core you your being. There is somebody even yet today who needs to see you, to bloom where you are planted and they might be right in your family and it might be for your children or you parents or your neighbors or friends or coworkers. Bloom where you are planted and know that you can change life.

When you look at the Apostle Paul, everyone thought he was a nobody. Before he wrote this book he was telling everybody: I am a Jew of Jews. I am well educated, I am a scholar. I know God's Word. And all of these things and he didn't like this man Jesus. He was persecuting and having people put to death and God made a way. He gave him a blinding experience on the road to Emmaus and he changed his life and he then changed our lives and continues today.

So when you are rushing and busy and wonder if you can do anymore in this hectic life... imagine probably all of us, right? All of us are so busy, God says: Slow down because you have to start choosing what is it that you are doing? This is the key about our gifts: Is there any God in it? We can do a lot of good with our life. We can do a lot of activities. But is there God in it? Is the church...it's wonder to have the church full and I would love to see this place packed full from morning until night every single day, but the activities that we do should be a reflection of Jesus Christ, not just a word spoken, but in our deeds, the things we talk about, our plans and in our lives at home, it ought to be the same way. What are we

teaching our children? I'm always impressed with the children here at Calvary. They know their Bible. Are we teaching God and can God be seen in the things that we do with our lives? Are we listening and is God truly the anchor? Do we have our trust in God or is our trust that if we work more, if we save more, or if we do more? We heard the children say that God forgives us of our sins and he went to the cross, that's good news. Without that we wouldn't have salvation.

But, do you trust completely God to have your full life? That you are not holding some of it back at all? Our gifts and our talents...they are made available. I love this thing, I'm sure you have seen it. Your talent is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift back to God.

We are in a broken world that is looking for you and now the scriptures tell us we, you and I, are the body of Christ. God is not walking among us other than through you and me. And people around us are looking for hope. And the question is this: What is your why? Why do you do the things you do? Why are you involved in the places you are involved in? Why do you say thing things you do? What is your why? The why should be about Christ. If we are Christians, it is not a Sunday thing and the rest of the week we're done.

It is a day by day thing, and the why of everything we do is somehow related to Jesus Christ. Getting ourselves involved. When I think of involvement it's not always in this place. I hope you have heard that before. We need good, moral, ethical Christian witnesses in Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and in the ball teams and in the dance teams and all those activities beyond the local church. My question is: Where are you engaging your gifts for God? Are you taking those gifts out? Are you equipping the community around you to be like Christ? Are you praying? My prayer life this year has increased greatly. Lord, where would you have me? What is it that you want from me and where is it even for our congregation? Pray for Calvary leaders. Pray for this congregation that we can find our way because all the time life is changing. This community doesn't look like it did 50 years ago. It was all but a farming community here. What is it that God will have us?

And study. Sometimes I hear folks as we get older say: Well, I'm old and you can't teach old dogs new tricks. Did you ever hear that? You ain't dogs. And what we learn here are not tricks. This is the Word of God. We study it. We prepare. What I did in plumbing and electrical...I had to go up to Mom's Friday. She got a refrigerator and you know what happens. You move the refrigerator and the pipe broke that fed the water and it broke in the basement so we had a leak so we went to do that and the valve was 28 years old and it broke. Then I had to shut off all the water. Whew! You know how that is. And nothing in plumbing is the way it was 30 years ago. And nothing in your life is the same as it was 30 years ago. We are not dogs and these aren't tricks. We have to keep up with the times. We learn what is going on and we find ways to equip ourselves, prepare ourselves, that we can do the bidding of God wherever we are all the time.

Though we are many, we are one body. We are in Christ and you and I can change this world. I believe it. I believe it. I hear it when people come in. See I'm in that blessed office where people come in and say: I don't know where I would be without Calvary. Boy, that makes my day because that wasn't me. Someone else here did something and Calvary, in the name of Jesus Christ, gets blessed because someone's life was touched in a caring way by something and God says: The reason we do this is because I really, really, love you. Knowing that someone really loves us, to me is enough of an incentive to say: what can I do for you.

Lord, my gifts, my talents, my very life, all that I am, is yours. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, you have given us so much and the very gift of our life is such a blessing. Mold us and shape us, speak to us, enable us to listen and enable us to find our pathway. Enable us to be your light. Enable us to never be quiet, but take your Word into the world. We ask in your Most Holy Name. Amen.