

SERMON – THE 2ND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY – 16 JANUARY 2011
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Romans 12:6

HAVING then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us

This morning it looks like we are going to talk about gifts again. In the Gospel for the Epiphany we heard about the gifts of the Wise Men, gold, frankincense and myrrh, or as the little boy in the Christmas pageant put it gold, commonsense and mirth.

Last Sunday, In the Collect we prayed for God to accept our prayers. The original Latin for that Collect asked God to accept our gifts. This was coupled with the Epistle reading from Romans where Paul exhorts us to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice.

Now, today we hear that we are given gifts that differ according to God's grace that is given us.

I Cor 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

All gifts are equal, just different. My gift, whatever that might be, will be different than yours, or yours, or yours. Just as God's grace is given us according to our individual needs, our gifts are handed out in the same way.

Just like the parable of the talents we are all given different gifts and we are expected to use those gifts for the Kingdom of God. If we do not use those gifts as they are intended, well you know the rest of the story. **Matthew 25:28 (KJV)** *Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.*

God gives us the gift of Grace. **James 4:6 (KJV)** *But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

What does that say? God gives the gift of grace to the humble.

We'll explore that idea another time.

Let's look at what gifts God gives us both temporal and spiritual. I don't really think we can get through all of them in just the short time we allow. Maybe if we preached like the Puritan's did, three to four hours, we might get more on the table.

For openers, let's talk about the gift of life. God continually creates and one of the ways that He works at this is through the miracle of conception and birth. Without this, you and I wouldn't be having this conversation.

We take this one much too casually. Since we are here, I have a feeling that we all just assume this is just normal not some miracle. But don't be too sure on that point.

Then there is the gift of health. That's one we don't think too much about, either, except when it goes.

There is then the gift of family and friends.

I think you are beginning to get the picture that everything we are or have is a gift, a gift from God.

That includes all that we have in the way of talents, treasure and time. These are all gifts and we are merely the stewards of them.

But let's look at other gifts that God has given us. You were beginning to think that you were going to get a stewardship sermon, didn't you?

Like the pastor who told his congregation one Sunday morning he had good news and bad news. The good news was that they had two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in the building fund, the bad news was that it all was in their pockets.

Seriously, let's talk about some gifts that God gives us that we don't sometimes realize; for instance, the gifts of decency, conversation and listening.

I can remember being on a debate team in High School. I also was on one in college. It was one of the ways I managed to overcome extreme shyness. We treated our opponents with decency.

We conversed on the matter, we debated the issue not our opponent personally. We did not attack them, to use the old, old expression, below the belt.

We conversed. We listened. We did not interrupt what they were saying by trying to over shout them. We respected, maybe not what they said but the fact they had a position they had every right to express.

I read once that Western civilization is based on conversation, the ability to express ideas and to discuss those ideas in an atmosphere of mutual respect and decency.

We do not have to agree with what others may believe or say but we as Christians have the duty to listen, not to take to the streets with shouts of anger. We should always witness for Christ in a manner that demonstrates that we are Christians, not rabble.

Some of you, perhaps all of you, may disagree with me when I say what happened in Tucson, Arizona, is a reflection of how we as a nation, as a global society, have forgotten to be loving decent people.

We all know that the act was committed by a very troubled, demon possessed, young man. But I also feel that we as a society have to accept part of the blame.

John Donne, the 16th – 17th Century Anglican priest and poet, once wrote, *No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.*

We do not stand alone. We are part of a whole that is spelled with the “w”

We do not stand alone. What we do affects everyone. If we do not listen, if we do not decently respect the positions that others might take, we are not fulfilling our place as Christian role-models in a troubled world..

Listening is a gift that all of us can develop. We all want the floor and there is not room for all of us to speak at the same time.

Let us all resolve to be better listeners. If we don't, how are we going to hear God when He does speak to us? It is only in silence that we can hear the "still, quiet voice of God."

Barbara Brown Taylor in her book, When God is Silent, tells the story about a group that was visiting the Nazi prison camp at Auschwitz in the dead of winter. She talks about the power that the silence of that place has. The members of the group were standing on the railroad tracks that lead into the camp, when one by one they began to sit down in the snow and listen, just listen to the silent voices that were present.

We cannot hear the silence of God when we are shouting, when we are yelling.

We have to sometimes sit in the snow and listen.

Amen.