

Rev. Robert W. Brown

Nurturing Your *Spiritual Gifts*: Tending the Fire

1 Peter 4:6-11 New Century Version (NCV)

INTRODUCTION:

In the beginning of this Christian religion, once new believers began to faithfully follow in the Way of Jesus, they were hard pressed to know what their official status was in the Roman Empire. It seemed that persecution from every corner was the cost of discipleship. The Jewish community had their own difficulties with the Empire, so these new followers of Jesus were not being easily assimilated into the ancient Jewish wisdom. They were desperate and hungry for leadership and guidance in navigating this new terrain.

Unlike the apostle Paul, the apostle **Peter** was one of the original 12 first disciples. He was an eyewitness to all that Jesus said and did. Peter was widely recognized as the head of this new movement and was known as the “apostle of hope”.

Today’s Scripture reading is an open letter that Peter wrote to all of the new believers through out Asia Minor. His goal is to encourage the readers to keep their hearts and minds fixed on the enormous grace of God that they have freely received and the ultimate promise of deliverance from all suffering.

Our reading this morning is from the fourth chapter of Peter’s first letter. Here is where he explains to them how they are to behave as followers of Christ. Hear this *Word of God* for the people of God...First Peter, chapter 4 verses 6 through 11

⁶ For this reason the Good News was preached to those who are now dead. Even though they were judged like all people, the Good News was preached to them so they could live in the spirit - just as God lives in Spirit.

⁷ The time is near when all things will end. So think clearly and control yourselves so you will be able to pray. ⁸ Most importantly, love each other deeply, because love will cause people to forgive each other for many sins. ⁹ Open your homes to each other, without complaining. ¹⁰ Each of you has received a gift to use to serve others. Be good servants of God’s various gifts of grace. ¹¹ Anyone who speaks should speak words from God. Anyone who serves should serve with the strength God gives so that in everything God will be praised through Jesus Christ. Power and glory belong to him forever and ever. Amen.



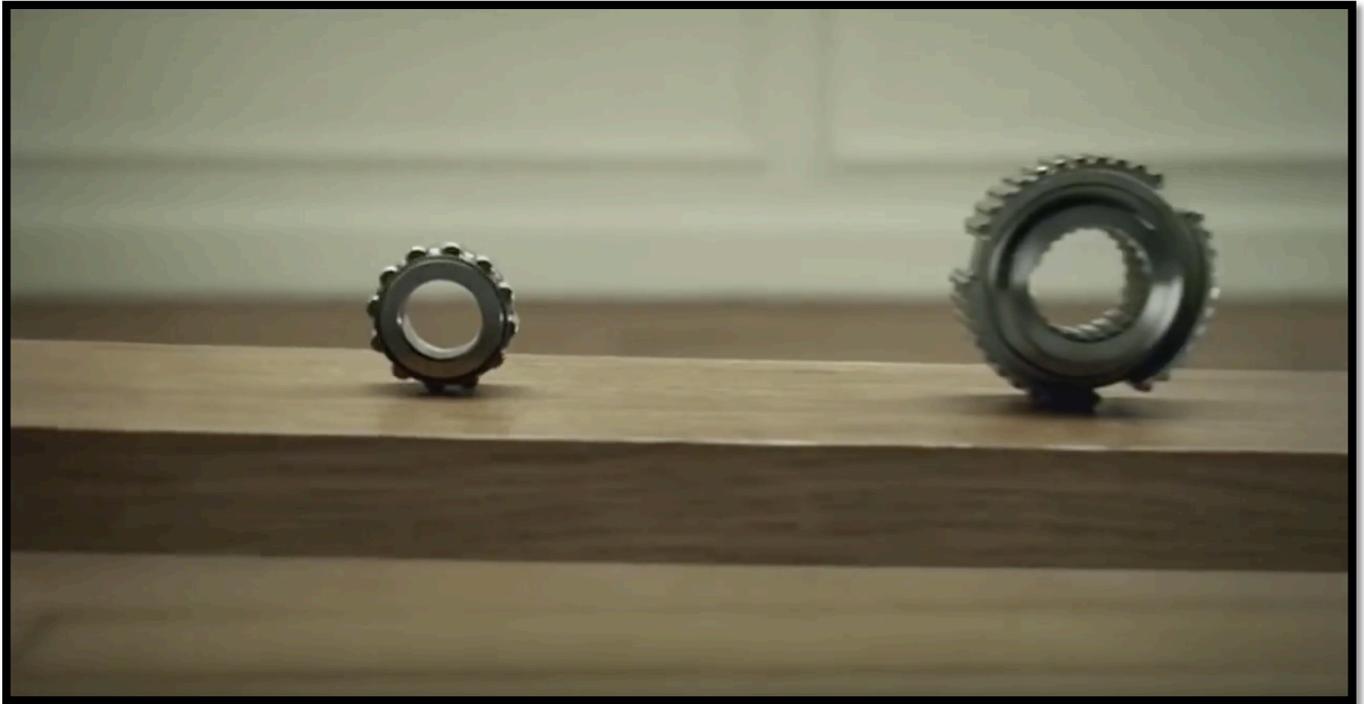
This summer we've been focusing on Spiritual Gifts. We have learned about how the Holy Spirit of God is manifest in all of us as this "indwelling presence". It is this Divine Presence that bestows each of us with certain gifts. Scripture teaches us that these Spiritual Gifts are given so that we might each play a vital and important role in the beloved community called the church. In unity with one another we become the living, breathing, embodiment of God in the here and now. Ideally the Church is, in fact, one body with many members and many functions. (Rom 12:1-8) God actually offers us the ability to become a Divine reflection of God's very self, just as different notes unify in the creation of one excellent chord. Our music director Victoria Wagner put this perfectly last week when she reminded us that each distinctive dissonant note is what creates harmony. Unity is not uniformity. She also pointed out that when singing our own distinctive note it is equally, or maybe even more important to listen carefully to the others. We must clearly hear the other notes that are not our own! We need to liberate ourselves from the echo chamber. We need to bubble bounce into a wider view.

Identifying and exercising our distinctive spiritual gift in community, even while appreciating the others gift, is crucial in the highly functioning, successful church. So much so that it is actually the only way for the realm of God to come into being. This is how it works both in heaven and on earth. Paul writes in chapter 2 of Ephesians, "*In [Christ] the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*" (Eph 2:21-22) This work of finding and nurturing our spiritual gifts is very important. If we are going to be built into a *dwelling place for God*, then every single part is a critical component to the success.

I like to repair things around the house. When my garage door opener recently broke, I took the thing apart, found the problem and replaced the part. It's so satisfying to me. I remember recently I had a problem with my lawn mower. So I took it apart, found the problem, replaced the defect and reassembled the motor. But, to my surprise, there was still one little part still left on my bench. I had no idea where it might go! Well, I thought, it's just a little spring around a small bolt, how important could it be? Everything seemed okay so I started the mower up and it hummed to life... until I tried to stop! That little piece was the kill in the kill switch! Good thing there wasn't much gas left! Even the smallest, seemingly least important part of the body of Christ is important.

When I talk about the importance of church community in our confirmation class I tell the kids how each of us has a part to play and when we offer our gift to the church, in

unity, is when the magic happens. Then I play a video. Here is a [TV commercial that was made in 2003 for the Honda Accord](#).¹This ad really explains what I mean.



There were no computer-generated effects in this film, this really happened pretty much the way you see it. But, it took years to conceive, build and film it. They actually shot 606 takes. Being church is going to be hard work, we will make mistakes, things will go wrong, it may take more time, but “isn’t it nice when things just work?”

A few weeks ago, Jean talked about how our love for one another and *the* other is the way we evaluate our effectiveness at being a church that “just works”. “Love is our [only] measuring stick” for excellence, LOVE for one another and *the* other is how we measure our shared success. In today’s scripture, Peter tells us that, “*Most importantly, [we are to] love each other deeply, because love will cause people to forgive each other for many sins.*” I’ve been in communities where love was thin. In these toxic environments everyone tries desperately to out do the other or even sabotage the other just to advance their own status or increase their perceived value. It’s so nasty! Every action carries a subtext of mistrust and every word is received with suspicion. Misunderstandings abound and unbridled conflict becomes routine. Apart from love, we dig into our resentment, believing that if only this *person* or that

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bl2U1p3fVRk>

institution would change, **then** I can be happy. A single person or a group of people becomes the enemy. We convince ourselves that *they* are the barrier to our wholeness. But in reality our misery comes from our own lack of compassion and love. When we can learn to love the other, our resentments melt away and loose all power. We discover that we have no enemies. Imagine no enemies!

When true love leads the way, small offences quickly dissipate, and even serious infractions are willingly dismissed. If we can abandon ourselves to loving one another, we find that we actually root for the success of the other and come to understand completely that the only route toward success is unity – even if it takes 606 takes!

In the end, nurturing our spiritual gifts boils down to this question. What ignites your fire? What is your unique gift to the world and where can it be applied to meet the great need in your world? Your gift may very well not be extraordinary to you but it most certainly is what you do well and is critically needed. Offer that gift freely, in love, without condition. A fire cannot sustain with only one log.

When adversity comes, and it will, sustain your passion with humility and prayer. Seek out others who can affirm your gift or guide you to what gift might be next.

The goal of nurturing and affirming our spiritual gifts is to create an uncommon unity in community that functions with a clear and unified purpose. This is our goal TriCon church, to empower our diverse and abundant gifts toward a spiritual wholeness. Our connection in love is the alchemy of strength that unifies our purpose to become servants to the least among us.

This truly is the only reason God has made us church. Amen?