

Using Your Gift

Romans 12:6b

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

It is hard when you are from a different country to know all the idioms that are recognized in another country. So I wonder if you have a saying that we have. In Ireland when somebody is trying to impress you with the fact that they have more experience than you do, they say to you, "Listen, I was working at that when you were just a twinkle in your father's eye." Do you have that? It suggests in a strange way that you existed at least as a thought before you actually came into being here on earth.

Last Sunday we saw that it was not just a matter of whether you ever existed as a twinkle in your father's eye but that you actually did exist as a part of someone far older than your dad and even more important than him. That is before you came to this earth. It is in a footnote in the Revised Standard Version if you look at it. John 1:4: "In him was life," and there is a footnote for the word "life". Go down to the bottom of the page to the footnote in the italics: "Or was not anything made. That which has been made was life in him." In other words, you who were made by God as a separate creature in creation were life in Jesus before you came here to earth. It means that you were kind of like part of his blood; it was as if you were a drop of his blood. In him before you ever came here, you were part of his life energy and what happened was that drop of his life energy was given your personality and enclosed in your body and then came to earth on your birthday. That is what that really means. That is the truth of your origin. The twinkle in your father's eye is funny but it is actually a godless lie because you didn't originate because your dad fell in love with your mom, and you are not just the result of a man's desire for a woman. You are actually here because you are part of Jesus, God's Son. You who were made, were before that life in him. It is his little nucleus of life energy in you that keeps you alive, gives you being and sustains you. It is that that makes you a creation and a real person.

What we said last day was that when we come to earth, we come because we come as part of Jesus himself. That is why you are here. Jesus has come back to earth in you to do something. At the beginning of Genesis God made the creation in different stages. Look at Genesis 1:2. The first stage was very imperfect, though it was perfect for that stage. "The earth was without form and void"--it was kind of a formless mass of matter--"and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Stage two was in verse 3: "And God said, 'Let there be light'; and then there was light." Then there are different stages as God adds vegetation and animals and then he added you. You came to do something that only you could do; you came to bring order into this creation. It is really Jesus coming first of all as the Holy Spirit, then coming as you to bring order and harmony into this creation. You find it in Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" Jesus has come back, a little drop of his blood in you, to complete this creation and to bring it into harmony with God's will. That is why the verse we studied last day is true. Would you look at Romans 12:6? "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us." That isn't just a vague kind of encouraging--"Buck up, even an ant like you has gifts!" It is not! It is not "Oh, well, you dumb-dumb. Even you have gifts. We all have gifts. Yours might not be so obvious, but you have one." It isn't that; it is a statement of fact. It is God saying, "Do you remember when I sent my Son to Galilee? Did I send him without arms or legs? Did I send him without

the gifts of healing and speaking to do what I had for him to do there? Do you think that I have sent his back here to earth in you without the necessary gifts to do what I have for him to do in you? Do you think I'd send him back in you to make a fool of him?" The verse is saying that you have a gift, the same as the rest of us. You have a gift because the whole purpose of you coming to earth is not to fly around here as a meaningless piece of humanity. The whole purpose from the Father, who is a God of order and not of confusion and who does nothing by chance was so that in sending you here, his Son inside you could complete the creation in some way that only you can.

I think some of us have real difficulty. We say, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.' I don't want to let Scripture down, so let me look inside and see what gift I have." You don't have to identify the gift that you have in order to back up Scripture. You don't need to defend God through your gift. Martin Luther said, "I would as soon defend a roaring lion as defend the Word of God." You don't need to prove scripture; scripture is true irrespective of whether you can prove it or not.

Loved ones, when you hear this verse don't get all strained and worried and think; "Now to prove that I'm an ordinary human being or that I'm a child of God, I'd better find some gift to prove this verse right." No. Relax. Don't strain, don't pretend, don't rationalize, and don't start looking in to see what gift you have. Accept the statement in God's word that he has sent you here with a certain gift that will be manifested in a certain way and that will not be manifested in any other human being in this world. Relax, accept that and don't start trying to prove that you have a gift. Relax and say, "That is right. If I was once life in Jesus and so I really live here because in fact Jesus made me and he is in me, then that is true. He wouldn't come back here to earth without something specific to do through me. He wouldn't come back to do something through me if he wasn't equipped to do it."

If you have a tendency at this moment to squirm out from under this and say, "Brother, you don't know how useless I am. You don't know how unmeaningful my life is." Then, loved ones, I would remind you that John 1:9 says that Jesus is the light of every man that has come into the world. So you can't get out of it. John 1:9 says he is the life of every man and woman that has come into the world. That means you. That means Jesus is a light inside you. It doesn't matter what you have done up to now with your life. It doesn't matter what your attitude to God has been up to the moment. Jesus the Son of God is in you in embryonic form and has a gift in you that he intends to use in this world.

Some of us say, "I had better hurry up and find it or I'll lose it." Some of us do get under strain that way. Others of us say, "I better find it quickly or I'll lose it." There is an amazing verse that gives incredible reassurance to us on that point. It is in Romans 11:29: "For the gifts and call of God are irrevocable." It is amazing, isn't it? The amazing thing is that you will have the gift that God has given you as long as you are on this earth, and it will die with you. The gift is irrevocable. Actually that verse says that the call also is irrevocable. So you have a responsibility here on earth and you have a gift to fulfill that responsibility, and both of them are irrevocable. The King James says God's gifts are given "without repentance." God doesn't take it back from you. You have it and you are stuck with it until you die. Aristotle Onassis and J. Paul Getty were given a gift for organization and financial administration. They retained that gift, whether they used it to develop the world's oil resources in such a way that everybody realized how ample was Christ's provision for the world's energy, or whether they used it to glorify themselves by emphasizing their own influence and power. They retained the gift right to the end of their lives. Dylan Thomas and John Steinbeck retained the gift of using words in novels and poems to set

forth reality and pictures of reality, whether they used that gift to set forth the beauty of Jesus or whether they used that gift, as Thomas did eventually, to destroy himself. Adolf Hitler and Napoleon retained the gift that they were given to lead millions of people in one direction whether they used it to bring great harmony to God's world or whether they used it to glorify their own power and might. Jeanne Dixon and Edgar Cayce retained the gift of their sensitive psyches, whether they used that gift to glorify Jesus and the good spiritual world or to glorify themselves and the evil spiritual world.

Isn't it amazing, how God is faithful in allowing you to retain the gift, whatever way you use it? And that is so with you. You retain the gift that God has given you, whether you use it to glorify and satisfy your own self-centered nature or whether you allow that nature to be wiped out in Jesus and remade to be used to please God, to fulfill the plan that he had in mind when he sent his Son back to earth in you. You retain that gift and you have the choice of which way you use it. Now if that is the key and the purpose of your life, how do you discover the gift, and how do you use it? God gives us guidance in the last part of Romans 12:6b, the last part of the verse. It runs, "having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith."

First, if you want to discover the gift God has given to you and to use it, accept right now that God has given you a gift. First of all do that. If you were going on vacation and your mom or your wife or somebody whose word you have come to trust said to you, "I put your toothbrush in your toiletry bag," you wouldn't immediately open the bag, haul out everything and check it out. You wouldn't. You would say, "I've trusted their word before and it has been faithful; it is good enough for me," and you would get about other things. Then you would go off on the vacation and fully expect that when you opened the bag in the hotel room in the evening, you would pull out your toothbrush. You trust them; you don't need to see it to know it is there. That is the first step.

Accept by faith

that God is not about to destroy the whole plan he has for the universe, he is not about to deny his own nature that has caused him such pain to maintain, in order to let you down. The Father is faithful to you. He says, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace of God given to you."

Accept that God has given you a gift.

Secondly, see that it has been given to you by God's grace. It is not according to your cleverness or your shrewdness or your importance or your fame or your power or your position or your reputation. It has been given to you according to God's grace. You may say, "I'm a pretty dumb person." It doesn't matter. You may say, "I don't see why I would get..." Yes, probably I don't see why you should get a gift either! But it is given to you according to God's generous heart. The Father loves you and he doesn't send you to make a fool of you. He sent you here because he wants you here. Not because you are just an optional extra to make life more complicated for the rest of us, but because God loves you and can do something through you that he can do through nobody else. It is important to see that it comes by God's grace and generosity and has nothing to do with your suitability or worthiness.

Thirdly, don't listen to those silly people who want to play spiritual parlor games. Don't listen to those silly people who have taken a very short list--and it is an incredibly short list of some of the thousands of gifts that God has given to his children--the few that are mentioned in I Corinthians 12, and then soulishly try to get everyone to experience not just one of those gifts but every one of those few gifts. That is silly stuff when they say, "Have you the gift of tongues? Have you the gift of prophecy?", and then

they have only seven of those gifts left and so they go through the others. Maybe it is because they realize subconsciously that they are looking at only a few of the mighty gifts that God has displayed all around the world, that they maybe reckon they should make you have the whole nine to make up for it. Loved ones, that is silly stuff. God states clearly the foolishness of that attitude in I Corinthians 12:29-30. I say this because some of you get into all kinds of psychological contortions trying to prove that you have got one of these few gifts. "Are all apostles?"--and the Greek is actually in the form of a question that expects the answer "No",--but the sheer sense of it shows that the answer is "No". Are all apostles? No. "Are all prophets?" No. "Are all teachers?" No. "Do all work miracles?" No. "Do all possess gifts of healing?" No. "Do all speak with tongues?" No. "Do all interpret?" No. God made it plain to us. Don't get yourself into contortions trying to prove that you have one or all of these few gifts that he has mentioned here.

Do you realize how many of us are here this morning and no head of hair is the same? Then complicate it by the noses--no nose is the same--and then the cheeks, the chins, the lips, the mouth, the teeth and the ears. If you go just that far, there is nobody the same as anybody else here this morning. Then get into our experiences and personalities and attitudes and views and all the things we understand, and you can see how different we all are. You can see clearly that Christ is come to earth in you to do something that he cannot do through any of the rest of us, because none of us are the same as you. We must also see that the gift he has given to you is connected up to his presence in you--the fact that he is in you. So listen for his word. As the days go by, listen for his word through your conscience or as you study his character in the Bible, and let him speak quietly to you to tell you what to do. Don't go into all kinds of contortions trying to prove that you have this gift or that gift or trying to get this gift or that gift. It is a gift! You don't grab at a gift; you receive a gift and allow it to be made real in you. The way to do it is to realize that the Savior, the Son of God, the Lord of life, is in you.

Some of you might not think of yourselves as Christians--you haven't been born of God. Do you realize that he is still in you and you are either burying his or will bury his completely so that his life will not raise you after this life is over, or you let his grow inside you? Actually he is inside; the seed of Jesus is in you. That is where any of your goodness comes from; that is where the order in your life comes from. So, see that and listen to him.

Then don't bother too much with what the world or society thinks are your gifts. The world and society are notoriously fallible. Not even your family--they are dears and they love you--but not even your family, not counsellors, not bosses or colleagues, nobody actually knows what your gift is. There is only One who knows, and that is because he gave it to you. Whether your gift is making plants grow, singing, or making machines work, he knows what that gift is. So don't get distracted by listening to what all the rest of us say. We don't know much, so don't listen to us, but see that within you are the One who has given you the gift and he can tell you what that gift is. Don't get distracted because you want to please somebody, and so you grab at a gift or a career. Let Jesus free you from all external compulsions and constraints that you may want to grab a gift because it makes you plenty of money or makes you famous. Let Jesus free you from that, and live in his presence so that you can hear him at last and blot out our loud voices.

Loved ones, he has something beautiful that he has given you. It may not make you famous and may not make you a lot of money, but it will satisfy. Deep, deep down you will feel, "I've lived a life. I have been what I was meant to be." That is worth everything. Even if you die in poverty or miserable sickness, that is worth everything. That is why you have come here to earth.

How do you use the gift? Here is the glory of it: Be yourself. Be yourself in Jesus, in his friendship. You are still far more tense about that than you need to be. The Father made you right. He made a butterfly to fly, so it flies; he made you to be yourself. Now if you push me and say, "But being myself has brought a lot of trouble." No! Being your perverted self, outside Jesus, being yourself that wanted to please everybody else or wanted to get all it could for itself, that brought you trouble. But when you come free in Jesus, and allow all that miserable old self to die with Christ on Calvary and you start being ordinary and friendly and real with the One who is within you, then there is a spirit inside you that begins to enable you to be yourself. You wouldn't believe it, but what the rest of us most need is you being yourself. You yourself with Jesus' Spirit inside, living through you; you are a beautiful person.

Loved ones, it really is true. Have the courage and the confidence to be yourself. Maybe twenty years hence you will look back and say, "That was my gift," and all the rest of us will have known it and will have benefited from it. That is a beautiful way to live. If you are sitting there thinking, "Not me!" You. He is the light that enlightens every man and he will enlighten you, too.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, you know what we are all thinking. You can see inside our minds. Even I know what some of our brothers and sisters are thinking. Lord, you know how uncertain and insecure many of us are. Lord, you know what contortions we have got used to by practicing in this life to please all kinds of people. Lord Jesus, you know all the lives that we have believed. You know how twisted and uptight we have become about this whole business of what are we here for. Lord, will you this day, you who live inside us, will you through our consciences and quiet moments begin to free us? Will you free us so we can begin to hear you and sense what you want us to do? Then we know, Lord, that the gift you have given us will be manifested in us and will be the fulfillment of you sending us here on this earth. Lord, we pray for that.

We pray that even this week you will reveal to us the ways in which we have drilled ourselves into actions, attitudes and even careers we shouldn't be anywhere near. Lord, will you reveal this to us? We want to be able to be ourselves. We realize that is the most precious thing you have given us -- our own unique self. Lord, we thank you for it.

Pray for each other this day that we would have a good day. We pray for real Sabbath rest for each one of us today so we may be ready for the week. So we are ready to live this week as we were meant to be. We trust you for the courage to do that whatever it costs over these coming days.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us today and forever more.