

The Gift of Healing
1 Cor 12:1-11, John 5:1-9

Well brothers and sisters, now that the Christmas holidays are behind us, at what point do you start to take down and put away all the Christmas decorations? Are you a Liturgical person who keeps everything going for the actual 12 days of Christmas until Epiphany on Jan 5th? Or do you get on it right away once the holidays are finished?

Or do you wait a couple of weeks into January because you'd just like to have the Christmas season linger on a little longer? Or maybe until the end of the month because you only just got around to putting up your decorations a week before Christmas so why take them down so soon?!

However, regardless of when you take down your decorations and officially close out the Christmas season, the gifts that we have received will continue to keep the memories and spirit of Christmas alive for us throughout the new year.

And... the degree to which we appreciate and treasure these gifts is directly related to how much we anticipated receiving them.

When I was a kid this time of anticipate was marked by the arrival of the Christmas Catalogue – either Sears or Consumers Distributing. Tragically Consumers Distributing no longer exists, but you can still access the Sears Christmas Wishbook online if you want to.

However, it's not quite the same as grabbing that two inch thick catalogue in your hands and running off to your room to pore over the toy section and the sports section and the electronics section to see what was new.

You could lose yourself for a couple of hours looking at the all the pictures of the items and going over the details in the sidebar – and then circling all the things that you wanted to get for Christmas, hoping you'd get some of them - and perhaps you'd also circle some items that you might want to get your for parents or siblings as well.

And then, over the next month, as the weeks and days until Christmas passed by – sooo slowly... you would go back to that catalogue, and flip to the page where you had circled what you hoped to receive...

And you would imagine what it would be like to open up that package under the tree at Christmas time and receive that toy you wanted so badly and how awesome it would be when you got it, and how you would play with it, and use it... and show it off to your friends...

And so you would take the catalogue again and look at it some more...

Now - for those who have never known the joy of looking through a Christmas Catalogue all I can say is; compare it to reading a Skymall or a Hammacher Schlemmer catalogue in an airplane, or how people look at things on Pinterest... but multiply the “wow and anticipation” factor by about a hundred.

Do you know what I’m talking about? Did you ever do this? Maybe you still do this – online... as you look forward, and anticipate what gifts we might receive for Christmas.

And now that Christmas has come and gone, its fair to ask as we usually do after the holidays – what gift(s) did you get for Christmas?

But this year as we ask that question of each other, lets consider not the materials gifts we received... but consider if – as the grace of God’s incarnation in the birth of Christ has impacted us – consider if we have received any spiritual gifts?

So, brothers and sisters, what spiritual gifts did you receive for Christmas?? Were you even anticipating receiving spiritual gifts this year? Maybe you’re wondering what spiritual gifts are – you weren’t even aware that was an option??

Well brothers and sisters, it is an option – and over the next month we’re going to look at these gift in the scriptures, much like how we would look at gifts in a catalogue or on Pinterest...

So that you can learn more about the gifts you may have received – and also so that you would begin to anticipate receiving some of these gifts in the future, and help you put them on your wish-list and ask the Holy Spirit for them.

Christmas is just the start of God’s gift-giving season, and we can ask for these spiritual gifts at any time.

Now this isn’t the first time we’ve looked at Spiritual gifts – you may recall that the New Testament catalogues twenty specific and distinct gifts; in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and 28-30, and Ephesians 4:11.

They are – in no particular order; Prophecy, serving, teaching, encouragement, generosity, leadership, mercy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discernment, tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostleship, helping, administration, evangelism, and shepherding.

And in the past I’ve given teaching on how spiritual gifts are better understood and described as “grace gifts” given by Holy

Spirit, because this emphasizes what their purpose is and also how they are distinct from your creational talents and skills.

“Grace Gifts” are things that you discover you can do – once you have been saved, once you have experienced the grace of Jesus Christ’s forgiveness for your sin and you have been brought back to life spiritually.

They are things you couldn’t do before this; they are gifts that come out of experiencing that grace and rebirth.

And so - their purpose is to be used to help others come to know, experience and grow in that same grace – the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ and being born again by the power of the Spirit.

And our Lord gives us these gifts to ensure that His Body has the right tools, the specific tools to fulfill His commission to “go and make disciples of all nations.” (Matt 28:18-20)

Because the temptation is to use other creational tools which we are competent with – like psychology, marketing ploys, business management, teaching methods, non-profit volunteer strategies and such, to try and help us accomplish our task of disciple making.

Now, these creational tools are good in and of themselves, but they were meant to be used to fulfill God's first great commission in Gen 1:28 where God says;

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

But, since the creation is under a curse as the consequence of our sin, creational tools – especially as they are affected by sin - can inadvertently turn the church into something other than the church.

It can become a social club, a community center, a group of social workers, a cultural association, or a non-profit organization...

And while it may still look like a church and call itself a church – and it may even have worship services, programs, and activities - it is powered by something other than the grace gifts and it ends up becoming something other than the Body of Christ.

It is as Paul says in 2 Tim 3:5 *“having a form of godliness but denying its power.”* Brother and sisters this is very good description of what goes wrong when a church is not using its grace-gifts – or is not anticipating or asking for them.

Now the good news is that Valleyview is not such a church!

We try to be very intentional about helping Christians discover, develop and use their grace gifts in ministry so that the church remains the Body of Christ.

And - each week during our prayer ministry time we are asking Christ to pour out more and more of His Holy Spirit upon us at Valleyview so that we will continue to grow and be empowered in our ministry!

However – we don't want to rest on our laurels or plateau, we need more of the Holy Spirit, and we need more growth in our grace-gifts because we are God wants to do more with us... and because we have more growth to experience, and because we are ministering to fallen human beings.

And as we work with each other and people in ministry – as they open up about their challenges, struggles and fears and doubts and so on – very quickly we will realize how little we are actually able to do for them.

Do you know what I mean?

What can you do when someone discovers their child has a life threatening illness? What can you do when a person has been deeply scarred by abuse?

How do you deal with someone's depression and inability to act for themselves? What about addiction – self destructive behavior – deep seated anger – or persistent irrational fear?

Brothers and sisters - if you work with people, or if you care about others, even just your family and close friends - it doesn't take too long before you realize your inability to do very much for them.

Sure - you can tell them Jesus loves them, you can say that you care for them, you can share scriptures with them, tell them that you'll pray for them - you may even pray with them but as good and obedient as those things are... we often see that it doesn't really remedy things, and kind of seems like a pat answer... do you know what I mean??

Now brothers and sisters, it's not because we're doing something we shouldn't and being insensitive – its because there is a need for healing, they need someone with the grace-gift of healing to minister to them bring healing to them.

And that's what we see Jesus doing in the story we read this morning about this disabled man at the pool of Bethesda. We see Jesus ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit to heal a disabled man in a miraculous way. Let's take a closer look.

So the pool of Bethesda was located a short distance outside of the city of Jerusalem, and it was a place you went to wait for a miracle.

Local legend had it that when - for whatever reason - the water in the pool starting swirling and moving it was believed that an Angel of the Lord had come down and touched the water and the first person who went in would be given a miraculous healing.

In all likelihood this was just a superstition that had developed over time – not that it wouldn't be possible for God to do this for his people – but it's that “first person in gets the miracle” part that makes it seem more like a superstition that had developed.

And some poor fellow had been waiting there for thirty eight years... waiting for his chance to get a miracle but because he could not walk – he could not drag himself fast enough over to the pool when the waters stirred – and he had no one to help him either – he'd never been able to get into the water first and be healed. Can you imagine... waiting thirty eight years?

I mean I get sick of being sick when I can't get over a sinus cold in a couple of weeks and I'm off to the doctor to get some medication. And we get angry about lock-downs going on for a few weeks, and we're tired of a pandemic that's gone on for a year...

But thirty eight years of wondering if the next moment might be the moment when those waters will stir.... Waiting, and waiting, and waiting...

Thirty eight years of having someone else get in before he could... because they had help, and he didn't.

Thirty eight years to be confined to that portico among those pillars on the hard stone... alone

Thirty eight years of hoping for a miracle- and somewhere early on realizing that it would be a miracle to get that miracle!

So when Jesus asks him the question “do you want to get well?” His answer reveals that he doesn’t believe he can get well... **because** he has no one to help him get to the water.

He sees the water in this particular pool as the only source for healing – but has he never thought to pray to God for healing?

Friends – first and foremost let us be clear about healing: whatever the means by which we receive healing - be it medicine, therapy, naturopathy, or even in this case... a local legend – the source of the healing is ultimately from God!

But it’s easy to forget this isn’t it. It’s easy to start to believe that healing comes from somewhere else, from the means by which we receive it, from the abilities to administer medicine and therapy and apply specific techniques.

Friends these are good gifts of God – but they are not the source of healing – God is!

By contrast friends, the grace-gift of healing bypasses these creational abilities and medicines and techniques and applies God’s healing power directly through those who have been given this gift in a straightforward manner– like Jesus does with this invalid at the pool of Bethesda - to remind us that healing comes from God!

Jesus simply addresses the man and God’s healing power is applied to him and he is healed! *“Get-up, pick up your mat and walk!”*

It’s the same with other healings in the New Testament – Paul sees a man lame from birth in the crowd he is preaching to and calls out to him *“Stand up on your feet!”* and the man jumps up and begins to walk (Acts 14:10)

And Peter says to the lame beggar outside the temple *“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”* (Acts 3:6)

Friends wouldn't you like to be able to minister to people in this way?

Have you ever passed by someone who was begging on the street and asked you for help and you wished you could do more than give them a few dollars... which they may very well use towards whatever problem is keeping them on the street to begin with...

And what about those times when we get the news that someone we know has been diagnosed with cancer, or some other terrible illness.

What about those we care about who struggle with depression, what about those situations where we discover someone has been abused?

What if you could just say “be healed in the name of Jesus” and they would be healed and made whole from whatever afflicted them! Wouldn't that just be awesome!

Friends, my goal in this sermon series is to create a longing within you to receive these grace-gifts, to have you want to receive them, to have you anticipate what you could do with them, imagine what it would be like to use them...

So, yes there is a lot more to the grace-gift of healing than simply walking around saying “be healed” to everyone we meet. There's more to learn about how to use it, when to use it, why we use it and so on...

But... if imagining what kind of healing impact the Holy Spirit's power working through you could have in the lives of people around you...

If this is the way to start getting you interested in the kinds of grace-gifts that Christ can give you... then friends, please

spend some time imagining the impact you could have on people's lives!

Imagine how you could contribute to the ministry of Valleyview and how this grace-gift would build up the church?

Imagine how you would be able to help people experience not just words about Jesus – but the healing power of Jesus – imagine how you could make Jesus real to them!

Wouldn't you want this? Wouldn't you want others in our church to be able to do this, or at least one person in our church to be able to do this?

It would be amazing – to see people be healed and made whole and restored and enabled to live the kind of life that Christ wants to give them.

Now I know there are all sorts of objections and doubts that we can have about this, starting with the fact that it just

sounds too fantastic and too amazing to be true – I mean healing people??? Come-on...

And we're all familiar with the flashy "faith-healers" who smack people on the forehead – who knows if that stuff is real or if they are just making it up???

Or maybe we've heard terrible stories about people who've done really stupid things because they believed they were healed and they actually weren't...

Or maybe you've really wanted this gift for a long time but you've not received it yet, or maybe if you had this gift someone you loved might still be with you...

Or perhaps you're wary that people might want to do this to get the glory for themselves, so they can be important, they have a savior-complex... or maybe it's the opposite?? You're just an ordinary Christian, not anyone special or particularly "holy" and this sort of thing is just for super-spiritual people, or for those charismatic type of people – not you...

Friends I know... I know all these about objections, there's some legit caution in them. And Jesus knows about all these objections too – but... just imagine anyways.

Because even though there are abuses, wrong motives, heartaches, doubts and regrets – even though we are sinners... God wants to give us gifts anyways and there are so many people around us, among us who could use some healing... who need some healing.

So imagine what it could be like to receive the grace-gift of healing and be able to impact the lives of the people around – and as you imagine that brothers and sisters, listen to what Jesus has to say to us;

“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” (John 14:12-14)

Do you hear Jesus speaking to you friends? Do you hear his simple, straightforward offer to you – ask... ask for anything... ask for anything in my name and I will do it!

Friends have faith, have faith and trust in what Jesus is saying to us, what He is offering to us, He will give us what we ask for as a gift of grace – that's His promise!

So pick a gift, pick any grace-gift in the catalogue friends – maybe pick the grace-gift of Healing... now that you know a bit more about it, and ask the Father in Jesus' name to give it to you, not because you deserve it – but because it comes from the grace of our salvation – and we need it.

After all – if we who are sinful, fallen human beings know how to give good gifts to our children, esp at Christmas time – how much more will our Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matt 7:11)

So imagine friends – imagine what it would be like to get the grace-gifts we need and desire – and ask for them. Amen.