

“SPIRITUAL GIFTS, THE GIFT OF OLD AGE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

August 31, 2014, 10:30AM

Scripture Text: Psalm 92:12-15; Proverbs 20:29

Introduction.

We have spent the summer talking about spiritual gifts and about using our gifts for ministry, about how we are called and gifted to serve one another in the body of Christ.

With a lot of help from Kara and Susan we have put in your boxes a summary of what we have learned about our gifts and our SHAPE and then have added a bunch of ideas and opportunities for you to consider as you seek God's leading in how to be faithful in using the gifts He has given you.

This tool is meant to help you and encourage you. If you want more information or help you can talk to me or any of the staff or one of the people listed on the back. Don't be passive, press on in fulfilling the purposes God has for you in His body. You will find blessing and joy in doing what He has called and created and gifted you to do.

Over the summer I have been privileged to learn of different ways some of our members are serving quietly in the church and in the community. There is one group of people in our midst that struggles with this whole matter of using our spiritual gifts, and that group is our senior saints who no longer can do all the things they used to do. I want to conclude our spiritual gifts series with two sermons with some wisdom and encouragement from God's Word for those who might think they are too old to serve usefully anymore.

America is getting older. 5,500 baby boomers turn 65 every day. Over 14% of America is over 65. But America seems to be allergic to getting older, many fight it or deny it for as long as possible. We are very much a youth driven culture that views getting older as a bad deal.

We live in a culture that exalts youthful energy and looks, that exalts rationality, autonomy and productivity. When our minds and bodies start to fail us we assume we are of little value and not needed anymore. What's the point of life for a person who is losing their mind, their independence and their ability to do useful things?

Wilting Violets? What about our senior saints?

Is old age a blessing or a curse? Depends on perspective, whether we have man's perspective or God's perspective. From our earthly perspective it seems more like a curse, like a wilting violet.

Just consider all things you can't do any more when you get older.

What can't you do?

I have had a lot of conversations with many of our senior saints. Many of you say the hardest part of old age is not being able to do the things you once did. You miss gardening and tending flowers, you miss volunteering in the community or at school or at church. You miss being able to travel or drive. You miss out on things you can't see or hear as well. You miss your memory. Those who can't be here especially miss coming to worship in their church.

You have fears you never had before.

Add to that the increasing fears. Fear of falling, fears about finances, fears about feeling useless, fears about the future. You grieve over losses, losses of privacy and independence, losses of eyesight or hearing or mobility, deaths of loved ones. You have to deal with constant pain and loneliness.

There are more scary words in your vocabulary, cancer, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, arthritis, rehab, shut-in, care center.

We wonder why they call them the Golden Years?

Someone said old age is when your knees buckle and your belt won't, and when you have too much room in the house and not enough room in the medicine cabinet.

Some of us are there, some of us are approaching it quickly, some of us will be there a lot sooner than we think. I just graduated from high school a couple of years ago and look where I am.

Psalm 92, Flourishing Palm Trees and Cedar Trees.

The Psalmist takes issue with our wilting violet perspective.

Psalm 92:12-14 the righteous will flourish like a palm tree and grow like a cedar tree.
13 They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God.
14 They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green,

What does the Psalmist mean by comparing old age to palm trees and cedar trees?

The palm tree is a symbol of straightness and fruitfulness, producing up to 600 pounds of fruit for up to 100 years. It's crowned on top with broad leaves. It's a tree characterized by uprightness, fruitfulness, longevity, and the ability to endure strong forces against it.

The cedars of Lebanon are a favorite biblical image. They grow to a great height and a very old age as evidenced by the old growth cedars in Whatcom County. They are resistance to outside bugs and diseases. Their wood is especially valued, used to make fine furniture and instruments.

They both have a very deep tap root that seeks out water from the depths enabling them to stay fresh and green well into old age.

Psalm 92:13 They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God.

The reason they flourish is because they are planted in the house of the Lord, they are deeply rooted in the things of God, things that are lasting, things that outlive health and money.

It's remarkable to me how many of our senior saints are reading their Bibles daily and devotionals like Today and the Daily Bread and other devotional books. Their tap root goes deep into spiritual water.

Isaiah 40:31 They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

Worship.

What can older people still do, well into old age? They can worship. Now there are some who might think, big deal. I've been worshipping for 70 or 80 years, I've been doing that all along. What about all the important jobs, tasks, ministries or acts of service that I can't do anymore?

We forget and need to be reminded that God desires worshippers more than He desires workers. The main reason God sends workers out into the world is to gain worshipers.

Worship is not all you can do, worship is the very best thing you can do because God is ultimate, God's glory is infinitely valuable. If we think this is a small thing or not enough we belittle the infinite worth of God. God created us for His glory and to give Him glory.

Psalm 71:5-6 For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.
6 ... My praise is continually of you.

Psalm 71:17-18 O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.

18 So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

Worship is the first thing we were taught to do and it's the last thing we can remember to do. It's amazing how you can go to the care center and meet someone who doesn't know who you are or what's going on, but in the worship gatherings they come alive singing the great old hymns.

We really do live in a Martha like world, but Jesus says there is something even more important than what Martha was doing, and that was what Mary was doing.

Worship is the goal, worship is the highest and greatest good. If all you could do in this life was offer worship to God, your life would not be a waste, your life would not be useless.

What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever. When we can't worship corporately, we can worship in our homes or care center rooms. We are particularly blessed that there are gatherings for worship in our care facilities in town. We can do it from a wheelchair, or a recliner, or a bed even through all the watches of the night.

As long as you have breath, offer to God what He is most worthy of, offer worship and praise and thanksgiving.

What is the first commandment? To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. There are no limitations on where or when you can do that.

Paul and Silas did it in chains from their prison cell. John did it while exiled on an island. Christians have done it in caves and refugee camps and while forced from their homes and churches or even being burned at the stake.

The purpose of God is worshippers. God will be shown to be the greatest of all Gods when in heaven we see that He alone is the one God who is worshiped by people from every tribe, tongue, language and people group.

Flourishing palms and towering cedars still worship and glorify God well into old age. If you can breathe you can worship. God created us for this and when we do it pleases Him.

Prayer.

The other infinitely valuable and useful thing we all can do even when we can't do anything else is pray. What does God call His house? A house of prayer for the nations.

Ephesians 6:18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

Scripture speaks again and again about being watchful in prayer, vigilant in prayer, persevering in prayer, urgent in prayer, calling on the Lord in time of need and trouble.

The reason we don't when we are younger is we are too independent and too busy doing things we think are important. But as we get older and can't be so busy doing, we can be busy praying.

The great need in our world today is prayer warriors, pray-ers committed to doing battle in the heavenlies, standing against the principalities and powers. We need a mighty army who pray in the Spirit, who lift up the sword of the Spirit in prayer.

Did it ever occur to you that the reason God keeps Christians alive into old age is so there will be plenty of prayer warriors hold up the arms of the leaders and volunteers in the church, teachers in schools, Christians in our community?

Every work of God begins with prayer. Pray is the Christians finest work. You think you aren't useful because you can't do volunteer work, but prayer surpasses all other work. Prayer releases the power of God and the power of the gospel in our world.

There is always a need for prayer warriors. Every aspect of the work of the church needs prayer from the custodian to the pastor. This is especially true for missionaries on the field. You can write them and ask what they need prayer for. Pray for revival in your church and in our land. We surely need it.

You can make your prayer time more effective if you have a prayer list or maybe several different prayer lists, maybe one for each day of the week, make our bulletin one of them. I talked to an 80 year old man on Friday who has several prayer lists and several prayer journals. He doesn't just pray his prayers he writes a prayer for the people he prays for regularly.

We need Anna's and Simeon's worshipping and praying. They prayed for the Messiah, for the consolation of Israel. I don't doubt it will be Anna's and Simeon's who pray in Christ's return.

God seeks worshippers and God seek intercessors and God raises up palms and cedars to do this most important work.

Application and conclusion.

Psalm 92:14 They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green.

Is the Psalmist being a bit glamorous about old age here? Is he overstating things a bit?

Growing older has its many challenges and obstacles. What is he talking about when he mentions bearing fruit in old age and being ever full of sap and green?

This is not the greenness of perpetual youth, but the greenness of maturity, of wisdom and of spiritual life and strength, a spiritual strength that youth know little about.

The elderly among us aren't just taking up space, they are the life blood of our fellowship. They are the ones most faithful in worship, they are the hidden force of prayer that undergirds our life.

They are the ones holding up the walls, they are the ones with the deep roots that give the stability.

I know a pastor who is in one of those new young denominations that is filled with pastors in their twenties and thirties. He has talked to me about changing denominations, he really wants one where there are pastors older than him, pastors with grey hair and experience and wisdom.

The elderly are a storehouse of spiritual wisdom and strength. You see someone using a walker and think they are weak, but you see with the wrong eyes. They have spiritual strength the rest of us don't have. Jesus is the rock for the elderly, the place of strength and hope. They are a living testimony to the faithfulness of God and the goodness of God, their very lives among us are a testimony to the praise of the glory of God.

Their example in worship and prayer is to be praised, encouraged and followed. To our senior brothers and sisters I say, don't grow weary in well doing for in due time you will reap a great reward. The best is yet to come. Amen.

Prayer:

Holy Father, thank you for all the crowns of glory in our midst, thank you for your steadfast love that has endured all the days of all our lives, even to the very end. Father, be with us as we face our fears and our losses, and help us to see your hand in that as you bring us through the changing seasons and prepare us for glory. Grant grace to those who are caring for spouses and loved ones and give them glimpses of your Spirit's on-going work. You seek worshipers and pray-ers, make us both for as long as we live for your glory.