

## MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### Our Second Gift

Mark 6:1-3

So, the radio was playing while I was driving to the church on a Saturday afternoon. It was tuned to a talk radio station so you can imagine the programming. Depending on the time of day it's an endless parade of "how to" and information shows on: gardening, home improvement, pet care, financial investing, car repair, medical issues, and even an on the air garage sale where people call in to sell things like lawn mowers and vacuum tubes for a few dollars. I've actually heard callers gush over how they look forward to this program every Saturday. And yes, I apparently listen too, but it's more for religious anthropology research than anything else. These shows, taken as a whole say an awful lot about what drives us as a culture and a people and that's always useful when trying to get what's going on in life to intersect with faith.

Anyway, the radio was playing the Home Improvement show and the topic was heating and cooling. The host was answering questions and explaining in detail the various types of intake valves needed depending on the name brand of air conditioners. But something was wrong; I recognized the host's voice but it wasn't in the right place. The regular host was away for whatever reason and as the replacement talked I was trying to remember where his voice belonged. Then it hit me, the fellow talking about heating and cooling was the host of the station's program on Financial Investing. The only thing I could figure out was that the Home Improvement host must have gotten sick at the last moment so they threw in the investment expert to cover dead air time.

As I continued to listen, by now parked in the church parking lot, other people would call in with problems and he would tell them how to fix their ductwork and thermostats. The guy sounded like he knew what he was talking about - but he was the money guy, not the handyman. Finally, at the end of the show he gave an explanation that solved the mystery. His name is Denny Smith and for years he worked in the family business, which was heating and cooling, but sold his interest to pursue a new career path in financial planning. In my mind's eye he has been quite successful in this new endeavor and he made it clear to the listeners that when his Investment show began after the commercial break he would not be taking any more calls from folks with heating and cooling questions.

For some reason that moment was a disconnect for me--financial planning and heating and cooling just shouldn't go together. Apparently I'm not alone in that line of thinking it's possible or even proper to be competent in radically different things.

Have you seen the commercials showing business establishments dabbling in two areas? One has the backdrop of a dock scene with boats and fishing nets and buildings weathered from the sea air. Painted on a dockside sign are the words “Fresh Fish and Manicures.” The two just don’t go together. We can’t visualize a crusty fisherman being skilled or even interested in giving manicures. Another of these commercials shows a dry cleaning store with another sign that says “Tap Dancing Lessons.” The two just don’t seem to go together.

This frame of mind is nothing new. Jesus experiences it in our sermon scripture for today. *“On the Sabbath he gave a lecture in the meeting place. He made a real hit, impressing everyone. ‘We had no idea he was this good!’ they said. ‘How did he get so wise all of a sudden, get such ability?’ But in the next breath they were cutting him down! ‘He’s just a carpenter – Mary’s boy.’”* For those who’d known him since he was a boy, being an eloquent speaker and teacher of the scriptures just didn’t fit with being a carpenter. In Jesus’ time family structure and loyalty didn’t allow much freedom in choosing a career. You did what your father did. You entered the family business. If your father was a heating and cooling specialist like the father of Denny Smith, that is what you were destined to be. And so Jesus was branded with his father’s vocation. Those who saw him as a carpenter could not imagine him as prophet material – the two didn’t mix.

And to take it to a different level, our problem isn’t just with accepting the idea that people can’t excel in two vastly different fields or talents, but that when all is said and done we can only be defined by and possess just one gift. Rather than seeing people and ourselves as “good for nothing” we conceptualize them and ourselves as “good for one thing.”

Our lectionary lesson on this Pentecost Sunday leads us to this perspective when outsiders see that Jesus’ followers are speaking different languages. They say, *“Aren’t these all Galileans? How come we’re hearing them talk in our version of the mother tongue?”* How could a bunch of blue collar Galileans have the gift of speaking more than one language?

And the apostle Paul makes it even more one sided. He says in one of his letters:

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.*

1 Corinthians 12: 7-11

That line of thinking around being “one gift people” carries into our day and age and drives much of the agendas behind the seminars, workshops, school curriculum, career development, and self help books we encounter. But I don’t buy that idea and I doubt that many of you do too. To quote from Bishop Leroy Hodapp when confronted with a far more controversial issue, the former Bishop of Indiana and associate pastor of this church whose funeral we hosted earlier this week, “I think Paul was wrong about that!”

I’ve been around long enough to see that many of you not only have the spirit of wisdom but something else like the gift of healing through things like care and compassion. I don’t believe the spirit rations out one special gift per person for we often find we have far more ability and interest in things than we imagine. I meet with people on occasion who are frustrated because they can’t find a way to carry their talent or gift into the realm of serving God. Maybe the answer to that is to say, *“Well then, use your other gift.”*

Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice is praised or, depending on your point of view, condemned for her diplomatic skills, but everyone who hears her play the piano agrees she has a gift. A trained concert pianist, she has played at the level of an equal with professional musicians and concert masters. I’ve read where her musical ability has opened doors her diplomacy skills have not. The music has brought some people to the table that never would have come otherwise.

National Public Radio has a segment called “Driveway Moments.” It’s the story of the week editors feel will be so interesting it will keep you in your car until it’s over. This week’s Driveway Moment brings us back to the manicure, for it’s about a working class white woman in her thirties named JL Freedmon working in a manicure shop in Baltimore. Anxious to have a client whose tip money would put gas in her car she was grateful when a college professor named Tony Platt walked into the store. Killing time while on a book promotion tour he thought he’d splurge and get a manicure.

Platt had done this several times before so he expected to be sitting in silence because of the language barrier that existed between himself and the manicurists from his home in California. But this one wanted to talk, so he described in his book called “Bloodlines” that he was surprised by her penetrating questions. Impressed, Platt turned the conversation to her, “What do you love in life?” he asked. “Poetry” she said. Freedmon explained that she didn’t write anything down because she was a bad speller. “It’s all in my head” she said. Platt asked her to share a poem and without hesitation she straightened her back and began to recite a poem written after witnessing the shooting of a young man.

*We’ve got to be willing to participate, communicate, and educate our children and teach them that there is more to life than just survival. Maybe we need to go back to our roots when we were tribal, we could first start reading the Bible. We’re in such a hurry to get somewhere fast we’re*

*still living in the past. But our feet, they aren't bound by chains and bullets, they don't have names so just ask yourself this question; What will make one brother want to be so cold that he would want to take another brother's soul.*

Professor Platt, writer and poet himself, was deeply moved commenting on the balanced rhythm and cadence, consistent thought, and good emotional expression all done in the context of having his nails buffed. Freedmon too was affected and wrote a poem to commemorate the experience.

*I wish I could give you my eyes so you could see. Maybe then you wouldn't call me a white wanna be and just know that I'm a person who takes a stand for humanity. I met a very interesting gentleman who listened to my crimes nodding his head to the beat of my rhythms In that instant I knew that I could no longer play it small. A bartender yells last call while the dealer says winner takes all. We are all natural born winners.*

Manicures and poetry don't go together...or do they? JL Freedmon is on to something. We are all winners and for those of us who don't think we are, it may be time to look toward our 2<sup>nd</sup> gift. What's your 2<sup>nd</sup> gift? Maybe it's the one better suited to open doorways to the eternal.

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