

June 4, 2017

"Perpetual Presents"



(Pentecost–Birthday of the Church)

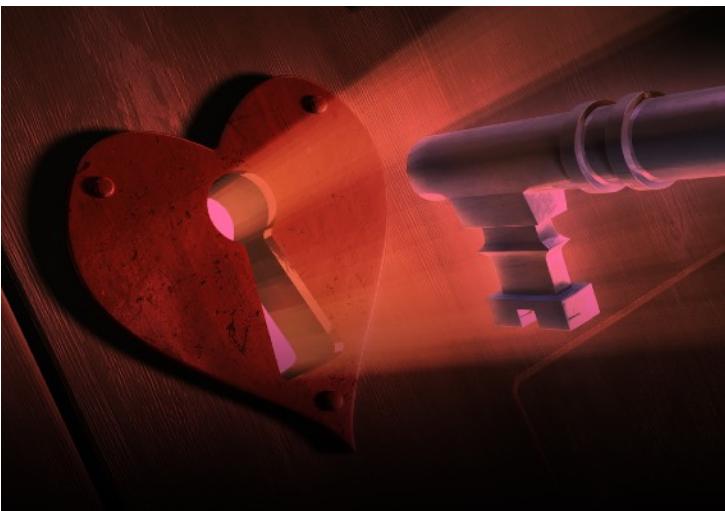
Numbers 11:24-29; 1 Corinthians 12 (13)

What better gift for God on the Church's Birthday than people whose lives are gifts?

What do we intentionally give back to God? And for all our giving, does it matter to us what God actually asks from us?

There's the constant tension of time in our lives, drawing distinctions between living within our moments and thinking of our lives in terms of the long arc of our histories, personal and corporate.

Interestingly enough, God's desire with us, God's will for our lives, is true and sound whether it's our moments or the manner in which we grow into our faith. The Spirit is given that we might gifts ourselves: to God, to ourselves, to each other, to the world.



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Numbers 11:24-29

24 So Moses went out and told the people the Lord's words. He assembled seventy men from the people's elders and placed them around the tent. **25** The Lord descended in a cloud, spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and placed it on the seventy elders. When the spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but only this once. **26** Two men had remained in the camp, one named Eldad and the second named Medad, and the spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they hadn't gone out to the tent, so they prophesied in the camp. **27** A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

28 Joshua, Nun's son and Moses' assistant since his youth, responded, "My master Moses, stop them!"

29 Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? If only all the Lord's people were prophets with the Lord placing his spirit on them!"

- v.25 seems to say that there is enough Spirit to go around. How

do we know when we have enough to do what God wants?

- Again and again, God seems to break with convention, break with our rules, to accomplish what God wants. Why have them then?
- Why would Joshua be jealous (v. 29)?



1 Corinthians 12-13

12:1 Brothers and sisters, I don't want you to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. **2** You know that when you were Gentiles you were often misled by false gods that can't even speak. **3** So I want to make it clear to you that no one says, "Jesus is cursed!" when speaking by God's Spirit, and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

4 There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; **5** and there are different ministries and the same Lord; **6** and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. **7** A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good. **8** A word of wisdom is given by the

Spirit to one person, a word of knowledge to another according to the same Spirit,⁹ faith to still another by the same Spirit, gifts of healing to another in the one Spirit,¹⁰ performance of miracles to another, prophecy to another, the ability to tell spirits apart to another, different kinds of tongues^[a] to another, and the interpretation of the tongues to another.¹¹ All these things are produced by the one and same Spirit who gives what he wants to each person.



12 Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many.

13 We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink.

14 Certainly the body isn't one part but many.¹⁵ If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body?¹⁶ If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an

eye," does that mean it's not part of the body?¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell?¹⁸ But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted.¹⁹ If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body?

20 But as it is, there are many parts but one body.²¹ So the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you," or in turn, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."²² Instead, the parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary.

23 The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren't presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity.²⁴ The parts of our body that are presentable don't need this. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor²⁵ so that there won't be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other.²⁶ If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it.

27 You are the body of Christ and parts of each other.²⁸ In the church, God has appointed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, the ability to help others, leadership

skills, different kinds of tongues.

29 All aren't apostles, are they? All aren't prophets, are they? All aren't teachers, are they? All don't perform miracles, do they? **30** All don't have gifts of healing, do they? All don't speak in different tongues, do they? All don't interpret, do they? **31** Use your ambition to try to get the greater gifts. And I'm going to show you an even better way.

13:1 If I speak in tongues of human beings and of angels but I don't have love, I'm a clanging gong or a clashing cymbal. **2** If I have the gift of prophecy and I know all the mysteries and everything else, and if I have such complete faith that I can move mountains but I don't have love, I'm nothing. **3** If I give away everything that I have and hand over my own body to feel good about what I've done but I don't have love, I receive no benefit whatsoever.

4 Love is patient, love is kind, it isn't jealous, it doesn't brag, it isn't arrogant, **5** it isn't rude, it doesn't seek its own advantage, it isn't irritable, it doesn't keep a record of complaints, **6** it isn't happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth. **7** Love puts up with all things, trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails. As for prophecies, they will be brought to an end. As for tongues, they will stop. As for

knowledge, it will be brought to an end. **9** We know in part and we prophesy in part; **10** but when the perfect comes, what is partial will be brought to an end. **11** When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, reason like a child, think like a child. But now that I have become a man, I've put an end to childish things.

12 Now we see a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known.

13 Now faith, hope, and love remain—these three things—and the greatest of these is love.

Footnotes:

1 Corinthians 12:10 Or "ecstatic speech" or "languages" could be used for "tongues" or "tongue" throughout chaps 12-14.

- What should be our ambition?
- What is the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit?
- How does chapter 13 read if you replace the word "love" with "maturity"?
- What perspective should we be taking with one another?
- What role do we have in one another's gifts?
- When do the parts of the Body have value? Who decides?
- What reasons are given for why the Spirit gives particular gifts to each of us.

Reflection on Numbers passage by Larry Broding

<http://www.word-sunday.com/Files/b/26-b/FR-26-b.html>

Sometimes mystery shrouds God's will. We expect God to act in a certain way only to be surprised. These can be times of insight or frustration.

This passage lies in the story of the grumbling Israelites who desired meat, not just manna. Addressing God, Moses lamented over their demands. God answered Moses' prayer by gathering the leaders and sending quail meat to the Israelites. But God afflicted the people for their greed with a plague. Hence, the place was called "Graves of Greed."

Moses could not lead the people alone. God used others as his instruments, including those not recognized as leaders [25-26]. The spirit of God gave the gift of prophecy, not the Israelite chain of command. That fact did not stop Joshua, Moses' right hand man, from objecting. But Moses sees clearly; who can tell God what to do? Moses, then, wished that all God's people had his Spirit, so all could share his intimacy and be his instruments [28-29]

There is old saying: God wants followers, not advisors. When God does not do what we want him to do,



**What is it that
God has placed in
our hands? In our
hearts? Do we
dare act on these
gifts?**

we might get angry at God; worse yet, we might be tempted to give up on God. When we are scandalized by God's will, is the source of scandal God or our desire to control God?

Commentary on Numbers passage by Richard Boyce

"Numbers 11:24-30"; Feasting on the Word, A Vol.3; Richard Boyce; pp3-7

One of the great things about Numbers in particular, and the Bible in general, is the way that extra stories seem to break out just when we think the main story is over. In a basic way, both the exodus in the

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

"You and I are the place of the promise of the kingdom now. Yet ultimately the kingdom is God's reign, God's effort, God's gift. We are not asked to usurp God, but to share his purpose and by his Spirit become his action in the world."

—William Loader

Old Testament and Jesus' resurrection in the New are "extra" stories that crop up once the main stories of oppression and power have done their worst. Even when the main story is positive, such as the ordering of the tribes at the beginning of Numbers and the apportionment of property at the end, little "extra" stories appear (about the tribe of the Levites or the daughters of Zelophehad) that may have more to tell us about God and

God's people than the major story now complete. Such an "addendum" is the second half of the reading from Numbers 11.

The main story in Numbers 11 is a story about grumbling—both on the part of the people and on the part of Moses. No sooner has Israel been organized and trained for the march, than the people, then Moses, come to a halt in order to complain—the people about the quality of the fare, and Moses about the burden of leadership. God, determined, even at great cost, to keep both Moses and the people moving, proposes two gracious and/or disciplinary acts—a surfeit of quails for the rabble (sufficient to fill them up to and out of their nostrils) and a surfeit of fellow leaders for Moses (as

made evident by that superabundant Hebrew number, seventy; see Exod. 1:5). Both the people (by the end of v. 35) and Moses (by the end of v. 25) know the answer to the question the Lord poses to Moses in verse 23: "Is the LORD's power limited?" (Here is a general biblical rule: watch out when the Lord poses rhetorical questions!)

Then comes this little "extra" story about Eldad and Medad (vv. 24–30).

First, it is unclear whether Eldad and Medad are part of the original seventy designated for a dose of Moses's spirit. Verse 24 implies that the full contingent has already been

assembled at the tent outside the camp, yet verse 26 makes clear that these two have been “registered.” Thus it becomes apparent that even the narrator is a little queasy about the Lord giving out more spirit than has been promised, particularly when that spirit is given to as rancorous a species as Homo sapiens. How will we control such gifts if we cannot count and register them or, at least, their recipients?

Second, there is another deep concern about “spirit control” rumbling in this passage. As the text worries over how many people will be affected, it also worries about how long their “affectation” will last. It is curious that a story about spreading the spirit also wants to make clear that the spread of spirit is only temporary: “when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again” (v. 25). Somebody, telling this story, is as worried about an oversupply of the spirit as about an oversupply of quail.

Third, and finally, it is even more remarkable that this little “extra” story about unauthorized spirit-sharing makes the canonical cut. While Joshua wants to stop the people, the incident inspires Moses, leading him to give one of the great speeches in all of Scripture: “Are you jealous [a loaded word, as the very God whom Moses serves has claimed some jealousy as part of this

God’s nature, Exod. 20:5] for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!” (v. 29). So, by Moses’s intervention, this little story becomes part of the big story, and we must ask, on this Pentecost Sunday, why?

Well, in one way, this little “extra” story makes a strong statement about control. While the writers of these stories are much concerned about which gifts are given outside the camp and which inside, whether Eldad and Medad are part of the seventy or make it seventy-two, whether spirit gifts are momentary and “charismatic” or can become lifetime and “institutional” (all concerns that later institutions of church and synagogue will take very seriously), the Lord, through Moses, is much less concerned. One of the annoying things about God’s spirit in the Old and New Testament is that while we may attempt to choreograph and control it (with liturgies and licenses and limits on office), it is ultimately more like the wind than our books of order: “The wind blows where it chooses, and . . . you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

In another way, this little “extra” story makes a stronger statement about the paradoxical nature of surfeits:

some may be bad (as in quails), while some may be good (as in spirit). Could it be that God's jealousy (unlike our own) is grounded not in possession but in generosity, that God cannot abide our giving ourselves to a God whose gifts are limited? Could it be that God's power is unlimited not only in numbers, but in duration, constantly spilling over till all God's people and all the world's nations become prophets? Could it be that Pentecost, for the church, is just like the story of Medad and Eldad, for the synagogue? There has been, is, and ever will be a little "spillage" when it comes to the Spirit's gifting. The Spirit made Medad and Eldad part of the seventy. The Spirit made the church a partner to the synagogue. Who knows, this Pentecost, what the Spirit may be up to next—as long as the Spirit makes it past our editors!

- "The Spirit of God is not confined to the tabernacle, but, like the wind, blows where He listeth." —Matthew Henry

- "Unity, not unvarying uniformity, is the law of God in the world of grace, as in that of nature. As the many members of the body compose an organic whole and none can be dispensed with as needless, so those variously gifted by the Spirit, compose a spiritual organic whole, the body of Christ, into which all are baptized by the one Spirit." —Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, 1871

- Inherent to the gifts we've been given is something elusive to our thinking at times but critically essential: responsibility.

- "We often confuse unity with uniformity, because it is much easier to gather with people who are like ourselves than it is to reach across the divisions which mark our culture. Thus, few of our churches reflect the ethnic, social, and economic diversity of the neighborhoods around them. Our congregations are often very homogenous, and we are, sadly, comfortable with that." — Brian Peterson

Additional Thoughts

- Is it ever really what we can do in God or is it what God can do with us?

