

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, January 19, 2025

“Spiritual Gifts”

## *Young at Heart Message*

I know this isn't great timing, but I have to be honest with you, I'm starving. I really need a snack.

Do you all mind if I have a quick snack?

It'll only take a minute - I promise - and then we can get back to our regularly scheduled worship service.

I have some bread here in case of a hunger emergency, but I don't have much else to make a sandwich.

Is there any chance any of you have some peanut butter?

How about jam? Anyone have jam?

OK, now I need a knife, and probably a plate too.

And, this is embarrassing, but can anyone tell me how to make a peanut butter sandwich?

*\*We work together to make a peanut butter sandwich\**

Wow, thank you all so much for working together to help make sure my stomach doesn't rumble too much during worship!

It was pretty lucky that some of you thought you might need a snack during worship today too and brought stuff to make a peanut butter sandwich.

But, like me, none of you had everything you needed to make a sandwich.

Each of us had just one important part of the sandwich-making process.

But, by working together and combining the items we brought, we were able to create a sandwich that we could all benefit from (if we cut it into small enough pieces).

And *that* is how you do a sermon on Spiritual Gifts! We all have our own gifts, we should all use those gifts to help each other, and we should respect and honour the gifts of others. Amen!

### ***The Message***

OK, that's not really the end of the sermon.

But, that is often how sermons on Spiritual Gifts go, isn't it?

Some variation of "we all have gifts and we should use them to work together and help others."

Except, as with most things, it isn't always that simple.

When I was in grade 7, I was asked to do an oral report in Social Studies class as a partner project with my cousin.

I don't remember preparing for that report at all, but I do remember giving the report. The only thing I remember is that we took turns giggling throughout the entire thing.

I don't think we even managed to present anything coherent to the class. You would not have believed then that I would be public speaking for a living today!

I think that was probably when I started to dislike having to do group projects in school.

In theory, I understand the benefit of group projects. But in reality, it always seems that no matter what, a few people tend to do all of the work on a group project, and then everyone gets the same grade, regardless of how much work each person put into the project.

Now, I've had to do a few group presentations more recently as part of my seminary experience, and I will say that it has gone slightly better.

But in general, group projects can be difficult.

We like to think we can each use our own gifts and talents to benefit the group, but often we end up doing something we aren't well-suited for, or something we don't really want to do.

Sometimes, no one else wants to do that piece. Other times, no one else has the skill set, and you don't either, but you come closer than some of the other people.

I remember my very first year at dog sports camp in Montana, we had a group relay event at the very end of camp.

It was a competition which involved four different activities that the dogs had to do: a short agility course, lure coursing, nose work, and carrying an egg on a spoon without breaking it as you walked your dog on leash.

A different person had to do each of the activities so that each member of the group did one thing with their dog.

My dog was a Bernese Mountain Dog. He wasn't suited for agility, nose work, or lure coursing. In fact, he wouldn't be able to do any of those things.

The only thing he could do was walk politely on leash so I could carry an egg on a spoon without breaking it.

Did I really want to do that activity? No way! I would have preferred one of the other, more exciting, activities. But, my dog's skill set only allowed him to do the boring egg-carrying activity.

Group "projects" can be challenging, and while we each hope we can divide the work evenly and each person can use their individual gifts and talents, it doesn't always work out that way in practice.

Take ministry, for example. It happens in ministry, too, that the same people tend to do most of the work, or that people end up doing work they aren't really suited for because no one else will.

And, we shouldn't be surprised by this. It happens in every group when people come together to try to meet a common goal.

Even Jesus acknowledged that the labor to laborer ratio is unbalanced in Matthew 9:37, when he said "the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few."

Churches ultimately are an investment in people, for better or for worse.

We support the work we believe we have been called to do. But, we cannot be expected to do that work alone, and we cannot bear the burden of doing the work of ministry on our own.

We need one another. That is why Paul reminds us so emphatically in his first letter to the Corinthians that every gift given by the Spirit was given for the common good.

Every gift was given for the benefit of the entire community of which we are a part.

As bearers of these gifts of the Spirit, we are called to use them to benefit our own church community, and the world around us.

But, very often in churches, the same people end up doing all the work because they believe that if they don't do it, no one else will.

So, even if they aren't enjoying the work, or if they have started to burn out on the work, they continue to do it because of this belief that it is their burden to bear and no one else's.

But, it is also true that this is often not the case at all. Sometimes, people don't step up to do certain work because someone else is already responsible for it.

So instead of offering to help, they figure they aren't needed because others are already doing the work.

This is how the same people tend to end up doing the bulk of the work, and how misunderstandings can happen.

It is also possible that those who have been doing the work a long time have a hard time passing the baton to someone else.

These are the dynamics that happen in every church community or organization that invest in people.

There are always ways we can use our own spiritual gifts and remain involved in ministries even as we encourage and uplift others and bring them alongside us to do the good work that we do.

It doesn't have to be an either/or. It can be a both/and scenario.

We can simultaneously do the work we have been doing for a very long time while also encouraging others to join us in that work, inviting them to use their own gifts and bring along new ideas to support the work we already do.

Sometimes, as difficult as it might be, doing group work may mean stepping aside and allowing others to use their own spiritual gifts to benefit the community as well.

We are not called to do this work alone. If we can lift each other up, encourage, and support one another, we may just see that more people start getting involved, and it feels less like the same people are always doing all the work.

Uplifting one another and celebrating each other's gifts is what we are called to do with one another.

So let us leave here today ready to do the work we are called to do, but also ready to encourage the gifts of others.

When we become a member of a church community, we automatically become part of one big group project.

The only way we remain successful in ministry is if we celebrate the gifts we were given and the gifts others were given, and use all of them to make the most delicious (metaphorical) peanut butter sandwich around. Amen.

Generous God, we thank you for the gifts of the Spirit which you have bestowed upon each of us. We pray that you would guide us and teach us to use the gifts you have entrusted us with, and we pray that you would help us wisely encourage others to use their gifts. Together, we pray that you would help us work to make your world a better place. In your Holy name, we pray. Amen.