

The Power Gifts: Faith, Healing and Miracles

1 Corinthians 12:4-10a

In our Bible reading from 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul is talking about spiritual gifts and he gives a list of them. During this post-Easter period St. Aidan's has been focusing on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Today in particular, I am going to talk about the "power gifts" of faith, healing and miracles.

The same God who created everything out of nothing is the same God who revealed himself through the Scriptures, the coming of his Son, Jesus, and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the church. As the Bible says at Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." The Lord works the same way now through his Holy Spirit, as in Jesus' earthly ministry.

God's desire is to set things right. We acknowledge this when we pray along with Jesus, "Thy kingdom Come". Our God loves us and wants to draw us to himself through faith in Jesus. He gives spiritual gifts to his church in order to build us up and send us out. We have the task of faithfulness and obedience.

The first power gift I want to talk about is the gift of faith. Faith belongs to everyone who believes in Jesus. The GIFT of faith, however, is faith above and beyond the natural. People who have the gift of faith in this way put the full weight of their lives in God's hands. In other words, they trust him completely. This comes as they experience a deeper intimacy with him through reading his word, receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and spending time with him in prayer and worship.

The early church, as we read in the book of Acts, had the gift of faith: courage, conviction and power. They faced persecution and eventual martyrdom but still spread the good news of Jesus Christ in power. It is due to their faith, through the working of the Holy Spirit, that we at St. Aidan's, are part of the Body of Christ today.

Jesus said, at Matthew 17:20, that if we have faith the size of a mustard seed, we can move mountains. What mountain needs to be moved today? One mountain that needs moving is cynicism, which is skepticism taken to the next level. Cynicism, which is anti-faith, keeps us from believing anything. Cynicism is a major affliction of our time. We need to ask Jesus for an increase of the gift of faith to move this mountain in our world.

The next power gift of the Holy Spirit I want to talk about is the gift of miracles.

Wouldn't we love to see a miracle happen in our lives? I like to think of the little miracles that have happened in my life, like the birth of a grandchild, or finding something precious that has been lost. However, the GIFT of miracles when something happens that is intended to bring glory to God. Miracles, because they happen outside of the natural order of things, point directly to God. In the same way that evil points to hell, miracles point to heaven and the goodness, kindness and love of Jesus.

If someone does an apparent miracle in order to attract a following to himself, or herself, or to reap financial benefit, this is not pleasing to God. In fact, it is possible that God may deliberately humble that person in order to keep them relying on his grace and pointing to his Son, rather than miracles.

If the gift of faith requires a long period of discipline, the gift of miracles takes longer. This gift requires a complete trust in God, complete obedience to him, and a humble heart. Expectant faith and miracles are often found together.

Miracles make us pay attention, so miracles seem to be most commonly experienced where the Gospel is making inroads in a new territory. In a cynical and skeptical world, we can pray for and look for God to do miracles to arouse real faith in people.

One gift that we all want is the GIFT of healing. How lovely it would be to make everyone healthy and well, no more sickness, no more suffering. Sounds like heaven, doesn't it?

There has been a lot written and taught about healing, in fact, in the online Alpha program at St. Aidan's we just had a section about healing. The talks about healing that continue to stand out for me are the stories about people who have been healed through prayer - that has the biggest impact on my faith: that God still heals today – using our prayers.

If healing comes up in a conversation, it usually goes in one of two ways, either "I don't believe in it." Or, "I know someone who was healed because of prayer."

Some years ago I heard Bishop David Pytches gave a series of talks about the Holy Spirit, and about healing in particular. He felt that for healing to happen there has to be faith in at least one person present: either the sick individual, a prayer person, or someone else (think of the paralytic whose friends lowered him through the ceiling for Jesus to heal). He said that when he gets ill he never thinks he will get well, but others have faith that God can and does make him well as they pray. Bishop David also told a story of when a mother with a sick baby saw him walking on the street wearing his clergy collar, and there and then asked him to pray. He had no faith, the baby had no faith, but the mother had faith that God would heal her baby. The baby was healed.

Chris Barnes told a story yesterday about a man, a neighbor to Chris' dad, who had kidney failure, was waiting for a transplant, but whose health was seriously going downhill. A grim prognosis. That man heard Chris was going to Israel and was taking prayer petitions to put into the wailing wall, the last remaining part of the Temple in Jerusalem.

So, Chris took a paper with a prayer for this man, tucked it into the wall and forgot about it, until 3 years later, when it came up in conversation with his dad. "Oh, didn't I tell you? I told him you had put his prayer into the wailing wall on a certain day and he and his wife started to cry. That was the day his health took a dramatic turn for the better".

I have had answers to healing prayer myself. My back had been injured as a child, and when I was in my 30's, I mentioned it to my mother, who calmly put her hand on my back and prayed. I felt a warmth in that area and my back never bothered me again.

I'm sure you have heard many stories about people being healed. I have a story about someone who wasn't healed.

My dad was diagnosed with an aggressive form of lung cancer when he was 61. I prayed, and our church prayed, we prayed, my mother prayed, and he prayed, but he died a year later. However, during that time he became a Christian. I remember sitting here in church two weeks after he died and was given a wonderful vision of my dad – wearing a golden crown and a radiant smile. He had the ultimate healing.

So, when it comes to healing, don't be afraid to ask. God is a loving father. He has his own reasons for answering our prayers in ways that don't always agree with what we want, but he can bring good out of anything when we turn it over to him.

The gift of healing is like the other spiritual gifts, meant to glorify God, and to strengthen our faith, to build up the church, and to encourage us to push forward with the good news about Jesus.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." Ephesians 3.20-21