

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

January 16, 2022 – EPIPHANY 2, YR. C

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Gifted—to Serve*”

Isaiah 62:1-5	(A prophecy of God’s <i>Shalom</i> to come)
Psalms 36:5-10	(The Lord is righteous and full of loving kindness)
1 Corinthians 12:1-11	(There are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit)
St. John 2:1-11	(Jesus changes water to wine at a wedding)

Traditionally they’ve been called “child prodigies,” although educators often label them “gifted and talented.” They are young people blessed with superior intelligence, amazing artistic talents, or seemingly unnatural physical abilities. We have all heard stories about a twelve-year-old graduating from medical school, or a six-year-old playing concert-worthy classical music on the piano.

Examples of child prodigies would include the 18th-century’s Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who learned to play the piano at the age of 4. He composed his first pieces of music at 5, and at age 8, wrote his first symphony. Another example would be the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso, who had already become an accomplished and renowned artist by his teenaged years.¹

In more recent history, some of you may have seen the video of Tiger Woods as a two-year-old on “The Tonight Show,” hitting golf balls. Half-a-century later, he was regarded as one of the greatest golfers of all time. And, as far back as 2009, Forbes estimated Tiger’s net worth to be \$600 million.²

Then, there’s Michael Kearney, born in Hawaii in 1984. He graduated from high school at age 6. He went on to earn a Bachelor’s Degree in Anthropology at 10; a Master’s Degree in Chemistry when he was 14; a Master’s Degree in Computer Science from Vanderbilt at age 18, and his Ph.D. in Chemistry at age 22. He had already begun teaching college at age 16—before he was even legally permitted to drive!³

Their stories astound us, as such gifted individuals are very rare. They are the exception to the rule. The vast majority of us are remarkably average. And yet, as I look out at you today, I can say with confidence that *every one of you* is gifted. Why? Because God said it first, and God does not lie.

Listen to verses 7 through 11 in the Contemporary English Version of today’s Epistle: “The [Holy] Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others. Some of us can speak with wisdom, while others can speak with knowledge, but these gifts come from the same Spirit. To others the Spirit has given great faith or the power to heal the sick or the power to work mighty miracles. Some of us are prophets, and some of us recognize when God’s Spirit is present. Others can speak different kinds of languages, and still others can tell what these languages mean. But it is the Spirit who does all this and decides which gifts to give to each of us.” Here, St. Paul is delivering more than a doctrinal lesson on gifts given to Christians by the Holy Spirit. He wants the Corinthian Church to know that *they are gifted people*.

The Holy Spirit had given them the gift of faith *and* gifts for serving others. St. John’s parish in the 21st-century is no different than Paul’s 1st-century congregation, because these truths apply to us as well. Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, still speaks through these inspired words saying to each of us, “*You are gifted!* You, too, have been given the gift of faith, and, you have been given a gift to serve others.”

Just as no child prodigy chose to be born an academic genius, an extraordinary artist, or an athletic superstar, none of us can take credit for being naturally gifted in spiritual matters. People like Mozart, Picasso, Woods, and Kearney were clearly endowed at birth with abilities above and beyond those of the average person. But also, they had parents and an environment that helped them develop their gifts. In a similar way, when we are “newborn” Christians, we have God’s first gift of the Holy Spirit, given to all who are Baptized. This gift is then nurtured through the means of grace that the Lord, our heavenly parent, has provided for us. Through His Word and the Sacraments, and through the fellowship of our faith community, the Holy Spirit has poured out upon each of us the gifts of faith, forgiveness, salvation, and a life in the Spirit.

Beyond these basics, the Holy Spirit has given each of us gifts to use for serving others, and in building up the Church.

So how do you know if you are gifted spiritually? Oh, you can find on the Internet some tests for “spiritual gifts,” but those aren’t really needed. Neither you nor I should even wonder if we are gifted. As long as we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior we have each been given the foundational gift of faith. Then, knowing our hearts, our natural talents and abilities, as well as our weaknesses and limitations, the Holy Spirit builds on our faith, adding other gifts which are not for *our* benefit, but for the good of the Church and for welfare of others.

If we combine the information found in Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, and 1 Peter 4:11, we find the Bible lists 17 gifts (apart from faith). Some of us may receive only one gift—which we are able to implement well. Others may receive multiple gifts because they complement one another. In alphabetical order they are: Administration; Being an Apostle; Discernment; Evangelism; Exhortation; Giving; Healing; Helps; Hospitality; Knowledge; Leadership; Mercy; Prophecy; Serving; Speaking in Tongues; Teaching (or Pastoring); and Wisdom.⁴

While Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good,” St. Peter goes a bit further, saying: “Each one should use whatever gift [you have] received to serve others, *faithfully administering God’s grace* in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). Ah, not only are we to help others, we are to do it *graciously*, not grudgingly, or in a self-serving way. We are to practice the gifts God gives us as though *He Himself* were ministering.

So what do these gifts look like for us today? “Serving” is such a broad category, it could mean everything from being a Greeter to delivering “Meals on Wheels,” ushering, assisting the Altar Guild or shoveling a neighbor’s snow. Perhaps the Lord has given you the gift of encouragement; you show genuine concern for others and lift their spirits with kind words and caring deeds. As you look at your financial blessings, maybe the Holy Spirit has given you the gift of contributing to the needy, or maintaining our church building.

In preparation for our Annual Meeting that follows today’s Mass, our Nominating Committee, Wardens, and I have had several conversations with members about serving as leaders. Yes, being a team member or serving on the Vestry takes time and effort. But this work is necessary and important so that we can continue Christ’s ministry at St. John’s until our Lord returns for us. When asked to serve in any position, always remember that you have at least *one* spiritual gift to draw upon in our church family. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to recognize it, then motivate you to *use* it.

Research on child prodigies or gifted and talented children has found that most are often bored in school or with life in general. Some are never challenged to use their gifts and end up wasting them. The same thing can happen to Christians. Our gifts go unused because either we are never invited to exercise them, or we are unwilling or afraid to risk putting our gifts into practice.

Today, I invite every one of you to look inside yourself honestly and sincerely, and prayerfully to ask God to show you what spiritual gift *or* gifts the Spirit has given you to use in service to others—*especially* gifts that may be underused. Because, “you *are* gifted!” Did you ever think anyone would say that about you? Well, God says it about you. As the Lord’s gifted people, in this coming year here at St. John’s Church, may each and every one of us *fully* deploy our gifts for God’s glory and the welfare of His people. *Amen.*

¹ Adapt. Michael Otterstatter, “You are Gifted!” [SermonCentral.com](https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/you-are-gifted-michael-otterstatter-sermon-on-action-143712), 1 February 2010 <<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/you-are-gifted-michael-otterstatter-sermon-on-action-143712>> 10 January 2022. Used with permission.

² “Tiger Woods,” [Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger_Woods), 6 January 2022, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger_Woods> 10 January 2022.

³ “Michael Kearney,” [Geniuses.club](https://geniuses.club/genius/michael-kearney), n.d. <<https://geniuses.club/genius/michael-kearney>> 10 January 2022.

⁴ “A Quick List of Biblical Spiritual Gifts: Which Gifts Exist and What They Mean,” [UnfoldingFaithBlog](https://www.tyndale.com/sites/unfoldingfaithblog/2019/0/01/a-quick-list-of-biblical-spiritual-gifts-which-gifts-exist-and-what-they-mean/), © 2018, Tyndale House <<https://www.tyndale.com/sites/unfoldingfaithblog/2019/0/01/a-quick-list-of-biblical-spiritual-gifts-which-gifts-exist-and-what-they-mean/>> 10 January 2022. Use with permission.