

***“The Gifts Christ Gave”***

Ordination Sermon for Paul Appleby  
6:00PM, Saturday, November 5, 2011  
First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Epistle to the Ephesians 4: 1-16

*I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.” (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)*

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in*

*love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

## **The Gifts Christ Gave**

A member of a nearby congregation said that pastors  
will always be a mystery to most church members  
because they are invisible six days a week,  
and incomprehensible on the seventh.

Recently I bumped into a neighbor in downtown Decatur.  
We got to talking about the similarities in our churches.  
The longer we talked the clearer it got we had more differences  
than similarities.  
As a matter of fact, it appeared that we had very little in common.  
My neighbor started to get exasperated with the gulf in our faith  
expressions.

To ease the tension I quoted the Apostle Paul, saying,  
“The Good News is *“there is one body and one Spirit  
...one Lord, one faith, one baptism,  
one God and Creator of all...”*”

My neighbor said, “Thank goodness for that.”  
After we parted to go our separate ways,  
I got to thinking that we share more in common  
than one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

We also share the gifts Christ gave.  
The next sentence that Paul wrote reads:

*“Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.  
Therefore it is said,*

*“When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;  
he gave gifts to his people.”*

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some  
prophets,*

*some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,  
to equip the saints for the work of ministry,  
for building up the body of Christ,  
until all of us come to the unity of the faith  
and of the knowledge of the Son of God,  
to maturity, to the measure of the full  
stature of Christ.”*

Every December our congregation offers an original Christmas  
Pageant

to the glory of God.

This year our story will focus on the Three Kings.

A working title is *“Three Wise Men...Are You Serious?”*

We know so well the biblical story of the gifts of the Wise Men,  
the way they visited Bethlehem and gave gifts of Gold,  
Frankincense and Myrrh.

Our pageant will explore the question, “Did Baby Jesus give them  
gifts in return?”

What about the gifts of a star in the East to guide them, a dream to  
live into,

courage for the journey, fortitude in friendship,  
and commitment to stand up to the principalities  
and powers?

What about the gifts to go home by another way,  
the gifts to tell their story,

and the gifts to proclaim the goodness of God?

### **The Gifts Christ Gave**

We are richly blessed to have in our midst people who have gifts,  
gifts from the Baby Jesus, (*“sweet little 8 pound 6 ounce*

*baby Jesus”)*

gifts given to us before we were born,  
gifts given to us over time,  
gifts honed and practiced and  
developed for the glory of God.

We have among us disciples, apostles, prophets, evangelists,  
preachers and teachers, servants and followers  
who are building up the body of Christ.

We have among us one whom Christ has called to stand up and tell  
the Good News.

We have tonight a Christian who is ready, willing and able  
to take on the mantle of Christian servant leadership,  
to love God and to love God’s people,  
to share with all of us the gifts  
that Christ Himself has given to a  
servant named Paul.

### **The Gifts Christ Gave**

May the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
affirm and authorize the vocational nature of clergy  
ordination  
as a functional Christian ministry.

May the Disciples even more so recognize and emphasize  
the Christological nature of the ordained ministry  
into which all people are called who are baptized  
in the name of the Creator, the Son, and the  
Holy Spirit.

God’s ordination at baptism of the *Laos*,  
the whole people of God,  
is an affirmation of the vocational identity of each  
person  
to serve and love God and one another in the  
name of Christ.

The church's ordination of those called, trained  
and set aside for the Christian ministry  
is a recognition and affirmation of the function of  
the minister  
to serve and love as a representative of the  
church of Jesus Christ.

The vocational identity of the ordained minister  
is grounded in the call of God  
as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Ordained Disciples ministers re-present the church  
to the world and to itself (Ephesians 4: 11-14),  
continually teaching and equipping the church to be  
true to its calling.

Like a watcher on the tower (Habakkuk 2:1-2),  
ordained ministers are called to function as overseers of  
church ministries,  
to hold the center as lives and nations are  
transformed by the grace of God.

Like Jesus of Nazareth at the Last Supper  
who commanded his disciples to remember him (1  
Corinthians 11: 23-26),  
Disciples clergy join with the laity  
to offer together the ordinances of the  
church  
where God's grace is discovered and  
celebrated.

Like a servant with a towel kneeling by a basin of water (John  
13:14),  
the pastor leads by example a life of humility and service

to the greater good of the wider community.

Like the *Logos* which examines the lives of those who hear it  
(Isaiah 55:10-11),  
the preacher is to be a minister of the Word,  
praising and proclaiming the saving love of Christ.

Like priests, prophets, and apostles who have gone before us,  
the pastor is charged with the responsibility and joy  
of practicing a ministry of presence,  
to be present and accountable in the mighty  
acts of God  
to encourage, heal, exorcize, redeem,  
and resurrect.

### **The Gifts Christ Gave**

Never underestimate the power of God's gifts.

A four-year-old child was watching her mother write notes on a  
legal pad.

*"Mommy, what are you doing?"*

She said, *"I'm writing a sermon, honey."*

*"Oh. Where does a sermon come from, Mommy?"*

*"God tells me what to say."*

*"Oh. So why do you keep crossing things out?"*

We gather regularly to hear and to speak the Word of God.

We receive this mission with joy and sincerity.

We grasp the potential of preaching.

This pulpit and this Table have served as platforms for the Good  
News

to be shared with grace, intelligence, humor, enthusiasm,  
and integrity.

You see, don't ever underestimate the potential of preaching.

In the Gospels there is a wonderful balance  
    in Jesus Christ's public and private faith walk.  
He goes on retreat then he heals the sick.  
He withdraws to pray then he visits the lonely and the lost.  
He goes up on the mountain top to be with God  
    then he goes down into the valley to save and serve God's  
people.  
One morning, while it was still very dark,  
    Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he  
prayed.  
And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

You would think Jesus' followers would grasp the importance  
    of a spiritual leaders' need for time alone,  
    for renewal, reflection and the gathering of strength.  
You do! I thank God daily that you do understand the need  
    for our spiritual leaders and guides  
    to have time for renewal, reflection, and  
preparation.

When the disciples found Jesus they said to him, "*Everyone is  
searching for you.*"

Jesus answered, "*Let us go on to the neighboring towns,  
so that I may proclaim the message there also;  
for that is what I came out to do.*"

And he went throughout Galilee,  
    proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting  
out demons.

Surprisingly, Jesus did not go back to the city,  
    but took the disciples into the surrounding towns,  
    explaining that He must preach there also.

The spoken Word of God has the power to transform hearts and  
behaviors.

Jesus did not underestimate the potential of preaching.

Thus Jesus went preaching and casting out demons  
in the synagogues throughout all Galilee.  
He combined his own gifts of preaching and practicing, saying and  
doing.

### **The Gifts Christ Gave**

In his novel called Barchester Towers, Anthony Trollope writes,  
*“There is, perhaps, no greater hardship  
on [humankind] in civilized and free countries  
than the necessity of listening to sermons.  
No one but a preaching clergyman has, in these realms,  
the power of compelling an audience to sit silent and be  
tormented.”*

Christian Century magazine editor and publisher John Buchanan  
says that those words flash across his consciousness  
occasionally,  
especially since he is a part of this remarkable  
phenomenon.

Buchanan says that he is sometimes amazed that people  
regularly come, sit and listen to a sermon,  
for the most part hopefully and expectantly.  
They probably give preachers a better hearing  
than they give anyone else on a regular basis.

We preachers can become our own harshest critics.  
What pastor has not felt inadequate before this daunting weekly  
responsibility?

One evening in downtown Atlanta I worshipped at First  
Presbyterian Church.

That night Walter Brueggemann spoke in earthy language  
and afterward Barbara Brown Taylor waxed poetic.  
They both offered magnificent sermons  
before 500 preachers.

I walked outside into the cool night air and said to the starry heavens,

*“That’s it. I quit. It has all been said.”*

And then I remembered that I had been baptized.  
Yet four days later I stood here and preached  
because there was one more soul to be redeemed,  
one more heart to be touched,  
one more person with a behavior to correct and  
adjust.

I choose to not underestimate the potential of preaching.

What preacher has not also had the experience  
of feeling dissatisfied with one’s sermon  
and then being told afterward by a listener  
that the sermon meant everything in the world to him,  
that it felt like the Word was directly addressed to  
her?

There is so much more going on in the delivery and receiving of  
the Word

than simply speaking and hearing.

This loving activity is cosmic;

it is transformational;

it’s personal and communal.

When the Word is offered to God and God’s people with true  
humility, joy and sincerity,

and the people really do listen,

the world makes a big mistake to underestimate the  
potential of preaching.

### **The Gifts Christ Gave**

Preaching and teaching are gifts.

Remember that preaching need not happen only in church or  
synagogue or temple.

Jesus took it to the streets, and we can too.

God works in and through the Church  
yet the Holy Spirit is not confined here.  
Some of the best sermons I have delivered were not scripted or  
recorded.  
You see, they happened in conversations  
in the most common places,  
like when a restaurant booth was transformed into  
sacred space.  
We looked down at the crusts on the plate and last sips of coffee  
and realization dawned that these were the bread and cup of  
life.  
Celebrate and give thanks that you have gifts from God,  
and one may be to have a Word to share.

The Apostle Paul said, *“If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no  
ground for boasting,  
for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not  
proclaim the gospel!”*

This congregation is intentional  
about giving as many people as possible  
an opportunity to speak and read and testify  
in the context of worship and in classrooms.  
We pray for you to feel and grow comfortable in speaking in  
public the language of faith.  
This is the language of the whole people of God.  
The more we speak and read and grasp the language of faith  
the better we should be at taking the Word from this sacred  
space  
into the sacred space of the wider community.  
Follow the lead of Jesus.  
He combined his own gifts for preaching and practicing, saying  
and doing.  
Let him model for you how to live into your own gifts.  
Withdraw and retreat and reflect.

Pray and listen for the Spirit.

Be open to the flow and movement of the  
Spirit  
to speak in and through you.

Then speak!

Call it preaching if that is what it is.

Or call your words a testimonial, or a friendly Word of counsel,  
or gossiping the gospel.

Label it whatever you like if it makes you more comfortable;  
the most important thing is to share the Word  
which the Lord has loosed within your soul.

The Word must be let out for it to accomplish that which the Lord  
has determined.

You see, we must never underestimate the potential of preaching.

Preach the Word, Paul Appleby!

Proclaim the Word, brothers and sisters!

Give away the gifts Christ has given to you.

Live into the gifts Christ has given you,

and you will be filled with all the power

of the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Extra material:

### **The Gifts Christ Gave**

Christ gave the gift of the Church.

This is a remarkable congregation.

Some of our world's finest pastors and leaders in the Disciples today

have been raised and nurtured in this community of faith.

Young people have walked into this sanctuary and chapel curious and nervous,

raw and raring to go, anxious and angry and passionate.

Many have gone forth from this place to pastor congregations, lead regional ministries, direct general units of the Christian Church, and touch the souls of millions.

First Christian Church of Decatur has played a significant role in the fostering of servant leaders.

We've blessed and commissioned Disciples of Jesus Christ

who have started shelters for women and children,

reconciled families, shared the Gospel in thought, word and deed,

and taught men, women and children

that they're defined by a God of

love.

We have respected the role and responsibility of the pastor.

The proof is in the pudding.

This congregation has had 5 senior pastors since 1933, covering a span of 78 years,

3 directors of music in 60 years, and 2 church organists in 65 years.

At the same time these pastors and musicians and educators have respected

the role and responsibilities of the congregation as bearers of the Word.

You see, this is a faith community where teachers and preachers and seekers alike

connect with the Spirit of God and one another around an open table.

We are a mutual admiration society:

we admire the bearers and shares of God's love,

and we admire that Christ is the One who gives the

gifts

that lift up and bear the whole people of God.