

Knox Uniting Church Cluster

Sunday May 31st 2026 – Cluster Service (Special ‘Celebration of Gifts’ Sunday – not RCL)

Sermon (reflection) – in two parts, by Russell Croxford at Bayswater Uniting Church

Bible passages: Ephesians 4:7-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:3-13 (NRSVUE)

“Discovering our gifts”

PART ONE – Ephesians reading.

One of the best things about receiving a gift is the anticipation and wondering about what’s inside the wrapping! What am I going to discover when I open this gift? Then comes the wonderful moment of discovery when you peel back the wrapping.

When it comes to our personal gifts of talents and abilities there can also be a wonderful moment of discovery when you learn you can do something that you didn’t think you could do. You discover that you actually do have the ability to play a musical instrument or paint a beautiful picture on a canvas, and you think to yourself, “Wow I can actually do this!”

It’s an even better feeling when the gift you’ve discovered you have is something that helps others, like someone who discovers that they have a gift of encouragement of others or the gift of leading a small group. Today we are celebrating the way God breathes the gift of his Spirit into us, enabling us all to express that gift in all sorts of different ways that help others.

This is the message we heard from Paul in our reading from Ephesians 4. In verse 7 we are told that each of us “was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift”. That word, ‘grace’ is the key word. In the original Greek the word is ‘charis’ meaning an act of unmerited or underserved kindness and generosity. A true gift is a gift that comes to us as this kind of grace. And Paul, in his letters, puts an even deeper meaning on ‘grace’ – in that it becomes something that transforms us inwardly. Grace is such a rich word in this biblical sense.

But this grace is not just for our own benefit. One of the purposes of receiving gifts and abilities, through grace, from the Spirit is to “build up the body of Christ” as it says in verse 12. This grace helps us to be ‘unified’ (v13), to ‘mature into the full stature of Christ’ (v13), and to give us clear purpose strength to hold the course. (v14). So ultimately, when everyone exercises their God-given abilities, the *whole* body – the whole church, grows and builds itself up in love (v16). This is the joy of discovering what each of us can do.

PART TWO (later in the service) – 1 Corinthians reading.

What do we have to do to stay healthy? Two words: diet and exercise! Those two words get drummed into us all the time. We may not be the best at doing those two things, but there’s no mistaking they are two essential components of good health. Diet and exercise. Input and output.

In our second reading from 1 Corinthians 12 Paul talks about diet and exercise in a spiritual sense. Input and output. The Holy Spirit is the input, and the output is the exercise of our gifts. This reading is quite similar to our earlier Ephesians 4 passage, in that we are gifted by the Spirit to help others. I mentioned before that we help others *within* the Body of Christ – the church, to build each other up and grow up into Christ. But this must be for a greater purpose ultimately. This building up within the Body is so that the Body, made up of all of us, can be exercised in the world.

This was the message of that first Pentecost. Those Apostles were gifted by the Spirit to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, well beyond the safety and confines of their own group. And again, Paul emphasises that each one of us is gifted in some way to help the church do exactly that – to witness in whatever way we are enabled to witness: Helping, caring, praying, giving, sharing, doing, speaking, leading – you name it.

Jesus was the living incarnation of God among people. As we exercise our various gifts, we become that living incarnation in the world. Like many different parts of the one body, we are being the Body of Christ, as it says in verse 12, collectively, in the one Spirit.

So of course, we don’t exist just to sit back in church and feed ourselves on a good diet. We must exercise! Today we celebrate what we can *each* do, and thus *collectively* do, to make a difference in the world.