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Sermon 23 January 2022

Title: Unwrapped 2: New Things

- Good morning church family! Let me welcome you again to the LargsNaz online service—we are certainly glad you are with us this morning—whether you’re watching at the LargsNaz Sunday brunch or from your virtual sanctuary—whatever time or place you are gathered with us, we are glad you’re here and hope that you are blessed by what you see and hear.
- As we mentioned last Sunday and as Pastor Tasha mentioned again earlier, this week was our future planning retreat—now, we call it a retreat, but that really seems like the opposite of what it is—we’re not retreating, we’re advancing, going forward into the future, and the days that we set aside to pray and write and listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit are always an amazing time—we always anticipate that God will provide inspiration and creativity and foresight—and God never ceases to exceed even what we anticipate if we make the effort to set aside the time and space to listen.
- And I certainly know that this is not an easy thing to do—and the world doesn’t make it easy—the busy-ness of our daily lives can become all consuming, and in our modern world we have elevated being busy to a virtue—but the scripture from the very beginning teaches us the value of a Sabbath every week—a time to set aside the tasks and the calendars and the

agendas and rest—to let God provide—and He certainly will as we allow Him to do so.

- This is certainly a truth that we see demonstrated in our weekly prayer time with our brothers and sisters on Wednesday mornings—we set aside that time to not only bring our petitions, our needs and our concerns, to God, and to give Him our thanksgivings—but also to be silent and to listen to the voice of the Spirit—our prayertime is not just about what we bring, but also about what God gives to us.
- And lately God has given to me one particular passage of scripture—it's a passage that you'll find on the front page of our church newsletter this month, and it is a passage from the words of the prophet Isaiah, who in chapter 43, verse 19, speaks the words of God Almighty who says I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.
- And as we look toward the new year that is before us, I believe that it is good to be reminded that we serve a God who is eternal, unchanging, whose steadfast love endures forever, who is the same yesterday, today and forevermore, but who is also unbound by our limitations—a God who is imaginative, unpredictable—a God who is ever surprising—the one who is able to do more than we can ask or even imagine—the one who always exceeds our expectations—
- Now certainly we are called to plan—to think about the future—to look forward in the direction in which we are moving—to determine where God

wants us to go and make arrangements to get there—but in all our planning and arranging and moving forward, we must always remember that God has some surprises in store—more than we can imagine—more than we could have possibly foreseen

- You know I remember back when I was a student at Trevecca Nazarene College—back when it was just a college and not a University like it is now—I was part of the student government because I was the editor of the student newspaper—and the student government officers had planned an event at homecoming—I can't remember what it was exactly—I believe it was a picnic with a BBQ and whatnot—what it was isn't important—but we were presenting our idea to a group of college administrators, and one of them asked our Student Government President a question I will never forget—he said, “it sounds like you've put a lot of effort into planning this event, but I have to ask, How have you prepared for any unforeseen problems?”
- And all of us on the student government committee sort of looked at each other, and then the student body president—His name was Kipp McClurg—he said, “With all due respect sir, I don't really see how we could prepare for any unforeseen problems. If we prepared for them, they wouldn't be unforeseen.”
- And we all had a good laugh about that, but there's an important truth there—because you can't prepare for unforeseen problems—and you also can't prepare for the unforeseen, unimaginable, unexpected grace and creativity of the God who does new things.

- Now a new thing that we are doing at the beginning of this new year is to take 3 Sundays and consider the gifts of the Spirit that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians –and during this time we’re not just considering the gifts of the spirit in general, but by the end of the series, particularly after next week’s second helping, we’ll have considered the gifts that are particular to each one of us—and we’ll begin to think about how God is calling us to use them as well. But we’re not there yet.
- Now last week we began to think about spiritual gifts and we can summarize what we considered last week into 3 points
- Last week we learned that
- 1 the MANY gifts of the Spirit are given by the ONE GOD—now this was in contrast to the many temples in Corinth to all the various Greek and Roman Gods that people might go to hoping to receive something—Paul reminds the church that while there are many gifts, there’s only one God who gives them
- Our second point that we learned last week—number 2 The gifts of the Spirit come with the batteries included—they are not only given, but also activated by the one who gives them, by the Spirit of the one true God—so it is not our power that provides the energy that makes a spiritual gift work, but the power of the Spirit—and third, we learned last week that
- 3 Gifts of the Spirit are given to each one—and every one—there are no ungifted disciples—the Spirit allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses

- Today I want to return to this same passage of scripture from Paul's first epistle to the church at Corinth, chapter 12, verses 1-11—and I want to suggest 3 additional points about the gifts of the Spirit that Paul wants the church at Corinth—and us-- to understand—because remember, he does not want them—or us-- to be uninformed concerning *pneumatikon*—about spiritual stuff—about the gifts of the spirit
- And the first point I want us to consider that Paul makes about the gifts of the Spirit is this—number 1: Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, God SPEAKS
- Now we noticed last week that in verse 2, Paul writes to the Corinthian church “You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.” And we pointed out how there were many temples to many gods where the people of Corinth who were pagans might go and make sacrifices in order to receive one thing or another—and last week we focused on the contrast between these many gods, and the ONE God who gives a variety of gifts
- But Paul is also making the point that these gods are silent-- nothing more than idols who cannot speak--and
- Unlike these silent Corinthian idols (Poseidon, Asclepius, and Aphrodite for example), the Holy Spirit—the ONE GOD (monotheism in contradiction to the polytheism of Corinth), the ONE GOD
- Speaks
- And Paul tells us that when the Holy Spirit speaks, it speaks through people—and what's more, the Holy Spirit speaks through those people who

have been given gifts of the Spirit, like the gift of tongues—that gift that the Corinthians are so obsessed with—and you can tell whether it's the Holy Spirit who is speaking or not, by what is said by the one who speaks. In verse 3 Pauls says:

- 12:3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" Ἀναθεμα ANATHEMA IHΣΟΥΣ, IĒSOUS and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" Κυριος KYRIOS IHΣΟΥΣ, IĒSOUS except by the Holy Spirit.
- Now, whether Paul is referring to what might be said by non-Christians who deny Jesus, or whether someone in the Corinthian church, perhaps in an ecstatic trance—speaking in tongues—has said “Jesus is cursed,” “Anathema Iesus” and maybe the people of the church didn’t criticise it because of their infatuation with that GIFT?—we don’t know, but what we do know is that when the Holy Spirit speaks, the Spirit proclaims that Jesus is Lord—and I think that this is an important point here—when God speaks through the Holy Spirit, God is not going to say anything that’s CONTRARY to the nature of the Spirit, anything that’s CONTRARY to the nature of Jesus—
- Have you ever heard folks claim that God told them to do one thing or another, and you think—you may THINK God is telling you that, but you might want to rethink whose voice it is you’re hearing—because it might be your own—I think what we can learn from what Paul is saying here is that God is never going to tell you to be unloving, or unjust, or selfish—God’s never going to tell you to do anything unnecessarily hurtful to someone—

God's never going to tell you not to forgive, or to hold a grudge, or to be untruthful (now He might tell you to be silent)—in the same way that the Holy Spirit is never going to say “anathema Iesous”

- Now let's think about what Paul is talking about when he says “no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” You might be tempted to say—but it's just a few words—anyone can say those words—but we need to be reminded of the historical context here for the people living under Roman rule in Corinth—where as we mentioned a few weeks ago, “Jesus is Lord” is not just a religious statement, it's a political one, because KYRIOS is the title of the Emperor—to say Kyrios Iesous, JESUS is LORD, is to say that the Emperor is not—because they can't both be. And so Paul is not talking about some simple words here, he's talking about a statement, “Kyrios Iesous—Jesus is Lord”—that pits the early Christians in contradiction to the culture at large—a statement that could get them killed—a statement that is a testimony to a radically different orientation and loyalty, not to the Kingdoms of this world, but to the coming Kingdom
- So Paul is reminding the Corinthian church, and us, that in contrast to the silent Corinthian idols, God, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, speaks.
- And God not only speaks through those gifts that have to do with the words we SAY, but God also speaks through those gifts that have to do with what we communicate through our actions and attitudes as well
- Now it's interesting, that, knowing how infatuated the church at Corinth was with the gift of tongues, that when Paul gives them a list of gifts of the

Spirit—that's from verses 8 through 10—he puts these two “utterances” at the top of the list—the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge—utterances, speaking, using words and language—and he puts the gift of tongues and interpretation of tongues, dead last.

- Let's look at what Paul says there:
- 12:8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,
- 12:9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
- 12:10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.
- So these are the gifts that Paul specifies that are given by the ONE GOD and through which the One God speaks—again, notice that Paul puts tongues last on the list—and first, the UTTERANCE, the SPEAKING of wisdom, *sophia*, and the utterance of knowledge, *gnōseōs* —the difference between wisdom and knowledge of course, is that knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit, while wisdom is knowing that it doesn't belong in a fruit salad
- But again, Paul is saying that while there are lots of very different gifts of the Spirit, it is the same ONE God, the same Spirit who SPEAKS through them all—wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues and interpretation

- Now I don't want you to think that because tongues and interpretation are last on that list, that they're not important—in fact, I think that the gift of being able to speak other people's language, and being able to understand the language that they use is as important today as it's ever been—but I'm not just talking about what we think of as “foreign languages” or “native languages”—we are living in a culture, as I'm sure you're well aware, where fewer people go to church than did say 50 years ago—in fact the overwhelming MAJORITY of people in our culture do not go to church—and as that gulf gets bigger, as more and more distance grows between the church and the people in the society around it, the harder it becomes for those people outside the church to understand the language that those inside the church use—and vice versa—we may encounter someone who is genuinely hurting, maybe searching for meaning in their life, and all too often we jump right into John 3:16, or start talking about sin and atonement and sanctification—when the person we're talking to has no context for any of that language—but we expect them to LEARN OUR LANGUAGE rather than embracing the power of the Spirit to allow us to speak and understand theirs—and so the ability to listen to the language that's used by real people outside the church—and to communicate the Good News of the gospel so that they understand it—as GOOD NEWS—is crucial—otherwise we're just talking past each other—speaking different languages---
- I remember back when I was a student in my first year at Trevecca in Nashville, I had a friend who was in the same Philosophy class, and since it

was Trevecca, we had a lot of very churchy people—and my friend loved to let people know he was an atheist—and inevitably, an argument would ensue—he'd say "I'm an atheist, there is no God." And the person he was speaking to would say, "Yes there is"—and he'd say "no there isn't"—and they'd say "yes there is" and they'd start quoting scripture—and the conversation would go nowhere because they were both trying to win an argument, to prove the other person wrong—

- so one day I asked him—"tell me about the God you don't believe in"—what do you not believe? WHY are you an atheist?—and he said, "Well I just think it's absurd to believe that there's some all-powerful Supreme Being who sits up in Heaven and created a world with awful diseases like cancer and causes all kinds of evil like earthquakes and murders and pandemics"—he went on for some time—finally, when he was done I said, "OK, it sounds to me like we're on the same page, because I don't believe in that God either. So we're both atheists as far as the God you described is concerned. I'm also an atheist regarding Apollo and Zeus and Poseidon—I don't believe in them either." And you could see the wheels start to turn in his head. And I said, can I tell you about the God I DO believe in?"
- And do you know it wasn't too long after that that he knelt at an altar in a chapel service and gave his heart to the Lord and his life to the work of the Kingdom and to make a long story short, he's been a pastor in the Methodist Church for some 30 years now

- And that wasn't something I did—it was the work of the Spirit in that conversation and I'm sure in many others like it, because God, through the gifts of the Spirit, speaks.
- Now the second point that Paul makes that I want us to consider this morning is this:
 - The GIFTS of the Spirit lead to ministries that have effects—
 - in verse 4 Paul writes:
 - 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
 - 12:5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;
 - 12:6 and there are varieties of activities
 - but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.
- Now Paul is talking about 3 things here that there are “varieties of”—first, gifts—he specifies what those are in verses 8 through 10—and those gifts lead to a “service” –now the word that is translated as “service” there is *diakonion*—that's where we get the word “deacon”—*diakonion* means a MINISTRY—and interestingly it can also mean what a waiter does at a restaurant—waiting on a table—it's used that way in the book of Acts—but here it refers to the ministry that grows out of the use of a gift – the way that gift is used—the ministry that **results** from that gift—and that ministry has EFFECTS—things happen because of it (*energiamaton*—we talked about that word last week)—the things that happen as a result of that ministry that grows out of that gift and the Holy Spirit that provides the energy that makes it work—

- And what I want you to notice here is this—Paul is connecting these 3 things—a gift, and its ministry and its effects to remind the Corinthian church—and us—what gifts are FOR—they are not to sit on a shelf, unused, but the gifts of the Spirit—that are given to each and every disciple—every follower of Jesus—are to be used, resulting in a ministry that has effects—a ministry that makes things happen—Paul is reminding the church at Corinth that they are not given a gift simply to demonstrate to others how gifted they are—to put on a show and say look how holy I am, I have the gift of tongues or the gift of interpretation –no, they are not to be used like that, they are to be used in ministry—in a ministry that makes things happen, that has effects in the world, among people—and remember that the gifts of the Spirit are given to each follower of Jesus
- And so if someone were to ask, me “How many ministers are there at LargsNaz?” you might think that I would say two, there’s me and there’s Pastor Tasha—but the truth is that there may be two pastors at LargsNaz, but there’s a whole roomful of ministers, because each and every one of us who are committed to following Jesus have been given gifts of the Spirit that we are called to make use of in ministry—and not just in our physical space but also all around the globe in our online family
- How many ministers are there in this church? As many as there are followers of Jesus, because The GIFTS of the Spirit lead to ministries that have effects—
- Now one last point I want to suggest this morning—number 3—third point about the gifts of the Spirit

- The gifts of the Spirit are for the common good
- Last week we looked at verse 7, where Paul writes
- 12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
- And you'll remember those first two words there that we talked about last week—TO EACH. Not to a select few, not to many, not to most, not to some—but to EACH—each and every member of the church at Corinth, and to each and every member of the church today—and these gifts are not located in a temple to a silent idol, NO--each and every member is given the manifestation of the Spirit personally—personally given the GIFTS that lead to MINSTRIES that have EFFECTS --and here Paul reminds us WHY those gifts are given and how they are to be used-- FOR THE COMMON GOOD.
- To EACH, individually, but not to be used INDIVIDUALLY--Not for our personal edification, not simply to make us feel good about ourselves, not to fulfil our potential alone—but FOR THE COMMON GOOD. That is what the gifts of the Spirit are for.
- The birthday of that gifted activist and spiritual leader, Dr Martin Luther King was this week, on the 15th—it's a national holiday in the US that was celebrated on Monday. Dr King would have been 93 had he not been gunned down at that hotel in Memphis.
- But this week I've seen a lot of people share inspirational quotations from Dr King on social media and other places—and there's one that I think is particularly relevant but it's usually reduced down to a single sentence—and that sentence is important, but I think it's even more meaningful when we're

reminded that it was part of a sermon—and you can find that sermon in the 1963 collection, *Strength to Love*—the title of that sermon was *Three Dimensions of a Complete Life*, and Dr King preached that sermon in 1957 in Montgomery, Alabama. The quote that you typically see is the last sentence of this passage, but I want you to hear the sentence in context. Dr King said:

- In a sense every day is judgment day, and we, through our deeds and words, our silence and speech, are constantly writing in the Book of Life. Light has come into the world, and every (one) must decide whether (they) will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. This is the judgment. Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?"
- Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?"
- Paul is in full agreement with Dr King when he writes: To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
- Why are you given that gift, that leads to that ministry, that results in those effects? FOR THE COMMON GOOD. FOR OTHERS. "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"
- Paul's words here are not just a description of where spiritual gifts come from, they are an admonition to use them, because through the gifts of the Spirit God speaks, and the gifts of the Spirit lead to ministries that have effects, for the common good.

- In the coming days I hope that we'll each do some intentional thinking and praying about the gifts that each of us have, and what ministries might result from them, and so if you're unsure about your gifts and the ministries that you are called to, I encourage you to be in prayer as we prepare for what God is calling us to this year, because GOD IS DOING NEW THINGS!!
- Now I want to let you know about a new thing that we're doing this year, and that's this--
- We are providing you with a tool that can help determine what your spiritual gifts are. It's a spiritual gifts survey that Pastor Tasha and I have edited and adapted for our church based on one that Pastor Sammy Robinson at Megain Nazarene over in Belfast shared with us, and we certainly appreciate that. You'll find it on the website there where the listening guide and the sermon transcript are, and you can print it from there. If you're joining us for brunch we'll be handing out hard copies for you.
- But it's fairly straightforward—I'm just going to give you an overview, do take the time to read all the instructions and information that's there, but basically you'll want to set aside about 15 to 30 minutes or so—don't take too long or overthink it--and there are 80 statements there—things like “I can sense when others are hurting,” and “I enjoy studying,” and for each of these statements, you're going to put a number from 1-5 out beside it, based on how true that statement is for you. You'll put a 5 if you think, “oh yeah, that's me to a T,” or a 3 if it's true about half the time, or a 1 if you think, “that's not true about me at all.”

- And once you've scored all of these statements—you'll probably want to take a break and have a cup of tea, but then what you do is look on the scoring page, and you'll see these rows out to the side of these individual gifts like "administration" and "discernment" and "apostleship," and in these rows you'll see these numbers—like 1, 17, 31, 47 and 59 for administration—and what you're going to do is go back and look at what score you gave each of those statements and write that above the number—so if you gave statement 1 a 4, you'd write that there, and statement 17 got a 3, you'd write that there—and when you have all of these written in, you add the scores for those 5 "administration" statements together to come up with a total. And you do these for each gift. And any of the gifts that have a total score of more than 19 are gifts that you probably have.
- Now we have suggested that once you've filled out your answers, you may want to share them with someone who knows you well, because sometimes others can see us and know us better than we know ourselves—so there might be a statement that you've given a 2 and they might say, "but you're very much like this, don't you think that's too low?"
- So what we'd like you to do this next week is take this survey and bring it with you next Sunday morning if you're coming to our worship or brunch -- and Pastor Tasha and I will make a copy of it and you can keep the original--, if you only join us online you can email it to us—now, unless you share this with someone, be assured that no one other than Pastor Tasha and I will see your survey—but we need to know what resources we have in our church

family as we look toward the exciting things that God is calling us to in the coming days—and we have some exciting things to tell you about—and next Sunday evening in our Second helping Bible study we'll be talking about how we can use the information in this survey to build the Kingdom and to serve the church and our communities—and there will be lots of other good practical information that will help us to think about what it means to be disciples of Jesus and to be the body of Christ in and for the world we live in. It's going to be inspiring and challenging and it'll be fun, too, and so I hope you'll join us for that.

- Until then, may the Lord bless you real good and we'll see you soon.