

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday After Epiphany, January 17, 2016

## **You Can't Ignore God's Call**

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

January 17, 2016

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

As I was preparing to write today's message, as I usually do I looked through my various references which related to the suggested Lectionary passages for today.

These include John 2:1-11, the story of Jesus' first miracle, turning water into wine during the wedding celebration at Cana, and today's reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul's discussion of the various gifts that God gives to individuals.

I had pretty much set my mind on talking about the miracle at Cana when I came across a book by Dr. Gene W. Laramy, "Speaking to People's Needs." Dr. Laramy is a member of the Trinity Presbyterian Church in Prescott, AZ where I was honored to be able to preach last August.

He is a retired pastor and his book is a collection of some of his sermons. After I preached at Trinity Presbyterian I was given a copy of the book as a thank you. Having a mountain of books that I have yet to read and little time to read them all, when we arrived home I put it on my bookshelf without reading it but I did add Dr. Laramy's scripture selections to a spreadsheet on my computer.

That spreadsheet told me that he had written a sermon on today's scripture from 1 Corinthians so I pulled out the book to see what he had to say on the text.

In his message he explained that he was a successful business person, had thought off and on again about going into the ministry, but dismissed the thought because of the difficulty of doing so --- leaving an established career, going back to school, and the extensive study which would have been required. He kept feeling the call from God but fought it for quite some time. Eventually he could no longer resist the call and at dinner one evening he blurted out, "*Honey, I have to go into the ministry!*"

He said that his wife nearly fell off of her chair and that their three children could not believe what they were hearing. He also said that he did not remember at that time even thinking about the ministry, nor did he remember saying those words, "*They just flowed out of my mouth without me doing anything.*"

The upshot of it was that at the age of 40 he left his job and entered Bangor Theological Seminary in Maine. He couldn't ignore God's call. His story is remarkably similar to mine.

Our scripture reading begins, *"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work."* (NIV)

The Spirit led Rev. Laramy and me into secular work. However the Spirit kept nagging both of us and eventually we both accepted the call to enter the ministry, albeit via different paths and at different ages. Dr. Laramy was 40 when he finally accepted the call; I was quite a bit older, 30 years older.

Dr. Laramy left his job to enter seminary and I gave up a very active professional career.

I had taken early retirement in 1993 as the executive Director of a national engineering society. We moved from West Virginia to Granite Falls where I started a consulting engineering practice and served on a volunteer basis as the chief administrative officer of a worldwide engineering professional society. I was incredibly busy but I very much enjoyed what I was doing.

When we came to North Carolina, we joined the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese. Waldensian is a rather large church. I was also a Scout leader there but in this church something was missing. While the people at Waldensian PC were wonderful and very welcoming to us, we concluded that it was not the right church for us. We really needed a small church and in 2004 we joined the Fairview Presbyterian Church finding a very loving and caring congregation and an outstanding pastor in Rev. Edyth Pruitt.

While at Fairview, I was reminded about the School of the Laity / Certified Lay Pastor program of this Presbytery and something told me that I had to enroll. I had considered a similar program many years earlier in West Virginia but had decided then that it was not feasible for me. This time I once again made all sorts of excuses not to do it but the message kept coming that I had to do it. God was not accepting no for an

answer. I enrolled in the program and know now that God wanted me to be a pastor. That message is incredibly clear to me.

In effect I really have been a pastor of sorts most of my life, particularly in working with youth for so many years and regularly conducting church services for Scouts and in handling the inevitable counseling needs that are encountered with groups of youth. My wife and I also funded the construction of an all-faith chapel at Camp Bud Schiele, the Scout camp of the Piedmont Scout Council so that Scouts and leaders would have a quiet place to pray and to worship while at that camp. For the past six years I have served as chaplain leading weekly worship services there during the summer.

Scouts are of all faiths and all Scouts pledge to “Do my duty to God.” A condition of being a Scout is faith in God and for most of my adult life I have conducted worship services for Scouts, not only for my own Scout Troops, but also at major conferences and large Scout camps in several states. I guess that in doing this it was the Spirit working on me and leading me toward the ministry. God leads us in so many ways that we don’t even realize. He has led each of you to Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church just as he has led me here. The Spirit calls to each of us leading us to serve the Lord in different ways --- as pastors, as elders, as volunteers in community service, and on and on. *“We are all given different gifts to be used at different times and in different ways. But they are all to be used in love [so that the body of Christ may be built up]. Wherever God has placed us, we can use what he has gifted us to do as we need, remembering that we are all part of the church --- the body of Christ.”* (Our Daily Bread, April 17, 2015).

Dr. Laramy’s family was astonished when out of the blue he announced that he was going into the ministry and, while she didn’t say it, I think that Betsy was similarly astonished when I made the same decision.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases Paul’s words saying:  
*“God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone*

*gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:*

*wise counsel*

*clear understanding*

*simple trust*

*healing the sick*

*miraculous acts*

*proclamation*

*distinguishing between spirits*

*tongues*

*interpretation of tongues.*

*“All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.” ([The Message](#)).*

God speaks to us through the Bible, His inspired word. Through the Bible we are guided and encouraged and are ever reminded of our forgiveness and our charge to live to the best of our ability as true servants of God.

What gifts has God given to you? How should you be using those gifts? Hopefully it won't take you as long to figure that out as it did me.

**Amen.**