

Most of us have heard stories of regifting. That practice of passing along a gift received to another person. Some believe it is ok and others strongly disagree citing stories of regifting gone wrong. And while people continue to disagree, it turns out Paul is definitely in favor of regifting.

For Paul, it is not only ok, it is expected of disciples and followers of Jesus. We are to actively regift the gifts God has given us; what God has intentionally knit together within us.

Today Paul continues his letter of instruction to the people of Corinth. He is concerned that people see their gifts as being about them and for themselves. He is concerned that they have created a hierarchy of gifts that is out of order.

Paul is clear, the gifts we are given come from God who entrusts each of us with them. They are to be used to glorify God and build up the body of Christ. That means we must give to others what we have received.

We are not to hoard them nor are we to hide them under a bushel basket. Just as **we are** to let our light shine brightly, we are to let God's gifts, given to us, be used to brighten the world.

In our first lesson we heard that Jeremiah was given the gift of being a leader and prophet. He had the opposite reaction from the people in Corinth.

Jeremiah didn't want the gifts he was given. He didn't believe he was good enough, prepared enough. He doubted he would be able to do the ministry God called him to do.

But he understood that it was not for himself he received these gifts. It was not for Jeremiah to say, look at me, look at how wonderful I am. It was for building up the community. Jeremiah was being called to regift what God had given him. Jeremiah was being called to trust God's gifting and step out in faith to do the ministry God intended for him to do.

It can be easy to think Jeremiah was a natural, that he was comfortable in this ministry God placed on him. But it is likely he was uncomfortable, uncertain, perhaps even fearful at times.

Just like Jeremiah, just like the disciples, we too have been given gifts by God. Gifts given not for us but for the church and for spreading the gospel. For building up the body of Christ.

I can hear some of you thinking, I don't really have any gifts, or I don't have any gifts that are important or needed.

Again, Paul is clear -- we are all given gifts. The eye cannot say to the foot I have no need for you. Or the ear to the belly button, I have no need for you. All are needed for the body of Christ, the church, to be strong, healthy, vibrant and a witness in the world of God's love.

There are many gifts and we each have one or more. But Paul tells us that we all have the gifts of hope, faith and love. And love, is the greatest of all gifts. Love is the one gift that is like glue for the church. It is what holds us together. It is what allows us to become more and more fully the body of Christ today, in this place.

This love is a verb, an action, a decision. It is about choosing to act out of love no matter what we feel. Act out of a love that is patient, a love that is kind... not just when I am feeling patient or kind but also when I am feeling impatient and unkind. I am to respond with the love that Paul describes even when I am angry or frustrated or irritable or hurt.

Is this easy? Maybe for some of you, but for me and many it isn't. Choosing to respond with love requires hard work, intentionality, and seeking forgiveness when we fail. It means we check ourselves and ask is my response coming from this love that Christ calls us to? Or is it coming from myself, my own self-interests, my own self-protection, my need for security.

I know I want to control the Holy Spirit within and through me. At times, I want to hide Christ's light, and even myself under the bushel basket -- letting it shine only for me and for those I allow to join me under my basket.

A while ago I was leaving Walmart. Darkness was coming. When I got to my car there was a woman beginning to load groceries into the car next to my driver's side. She had her trunk and both doors on my side open. I figured she would let me into my car. But no, she did not.

She kept loading, one item at a time, slowly, methodically. First something from a bag was placed into the back seat, then something into the trunk, then the front seat. I stood there impatiently. I did think about asking if she wanted help, but I was feeling put out by her, so I did not offer. She had a cart loaded with food, snacks and bottled drinks. I needed to be on the road. Well, I wanted to be on my way. I had stops to make and I wanted to be home before dark.

Finally, after a number of minutes of me just standing there, she looked at me and asked if I was waiting for her. I said yes and probably not in the best tone. She apologized and shut her passenger side doors.

As I went to get into the car, she again apologized -- telling me that a family member had just died. I expressed my sympathy. But did I offer to help her? Did I offer to pray for her and her loved ones? No. I was focused on getting on the road. Focused on my wants.

In that moment, I failed to act with love. As I backed up, she gave a little, lonely wave. Here was someone who was lost, lonely, and grieving.

In that moment I realized what I took for sloth and sluggishness was really someone who was overwhelmed. Yet I was too caught up in my own self, my own judgements, to see that -- until that lonely little wave.

For me, I was again confronted with my self-absorption and my quickness to judge. I had again come face to face with my selfishness and rudeness and had been found wanting. I had failed to choose to love.

Yet, God still loved me. God loved me enough to be there with me inviting me to be aware and to reach out even though I ignored God's voice. God extended me mercy even though I had failed to extend Christ's mercy to this woman.

Each of us have been given this gift of love among our other varied gifts. It is always our choice, our decision to exercise these gifts, to offer them, to allow them to be used by God. It is our choice if we use them or ignore them. We can offer, or we can withhold what God has given us.

God yearns and waits for us to regift. And while God waits on us, God understands whatever concerns we might have.

Remember Jeremiah -- when he balked at the gifts he was given? God said, do not be afraid -- I am with you. And girding himself in God's love, presence and strength he went forth to serve.

God intends for us to regift the gifts given us. But to do that means we have to open the gift and discover what God has bestowed upon us.

Few of us will have an experience like Jeremiah's, where God makes it very clear -- these are your gifts, here is how you are to use them. Rather it often requires intentional work and prayer to discern them.

So, what are your gifts? Have you unwrapped any of them? Have you even removed the bow or shaken it slightly to see what it might be? You can't regift unless you know what you have to regift.

And that requires action on our part. We have to open the gift box and then discern what is in the box.

That sounds easy and sometimes it is. You might quickly learn if you have or don't have the gift of music or building things. But often we struggle to discern what God has given us.

In part it might be that the gift seems so natural we dismiss it as nothing. Perhaps it is because we don't hear people affirming the gifts they have experienced in their relationship with us. Maybe we think we are too young or too old to have gifts that matter.

Paul tells us -- we all have gifts that are needed for the church, the body of Christ, to be strong, to be a light in this world shining forth God's light and love.

And so, in this time, we are being invited to unwrap and discover more fully God's gifts uniquely created within us. And then to offer these gifts but always through the lens of love.

A love that is patient and kind.

A love that is not envious or boastful, arrogant, or rude.

A love that is not irritable or resentful.

A love that rejoices in the truth.

A love that believes, that hopes and that endures.

That is the challenge that Paul -- that Jesus, calls disciples like us to embrace. For just as love is the greatest gift given to us -- our regifting of that same love is the greatest gift we can give to Jesus Christ.