

## **An Abundance of Gifts ~ January 17, 2010**

**Isaiah 62:1-5; I Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11; Psalm 36:5-10**

I am sure most of us have been watching the events that have taken place in Haiti. I am also certain that we all wish there was something we could do right now. I know that I do not believe, for a moment, that this earthquake occurred because God wanted to punish that nation and its people. It was a random act of nature, possibly, a shift in tectonic plates, that shook the earth. The devastation that followed happened because Haiti has always been a terribly poor country, used by some of its former leaders to enrich themselves while neglecting the people. It is a country that has not had the technology more advanced countries have that make buildings as earthquake proof as possible.

It seems that when there is a tragedy, such as this one, the very best is brought out in most people. Our country is always very generous in trying to help out. Nations all around the world forget their difficulties with one another and unite for a few brief moments. An abundance of gifts pours into such devastated areas of the world. These are the basic material gifts—those of food and water and shelter and clothing. But, the gifts that matter the most are those of loving and caring hands and hearts that emerge to rescue people, digging them out of the rubble, carrying them to find the limited medical help there is, burying them when it is too late, and handing out material gifts. The love and care and concern that appear are true gifts of the spirit, whether we care to call them that or not. Something stirs deep within hearts and souls and allows people to offer up themselves without stopping to think.

Paul wrote of gifts of the spirit in his Letter to the Corinthians. He urged those who read his thoughts to pause and consider what their special gifts and talents might be and how they could use them to best serve others. A gift that is not used is a wasted gift. He wanted people to learn if they had wisdom, knowledge, faith, the gift of healing and working miracles or that of prophesy. He wanted them to learn what it was of which they were made. Then, they were to use those gifts for the betterment of all in their world. Just as Jesus used the gifts he had been given.

We all have special spiritual gifts within us. I often see them shining through—some have the wonderful gift of joy that shines in them, others have amazing endurance that carries them far beyond any struggle they may have, others have deep wells of love and compassion that never seem to run dry and that they pour out over everyone, some can forgive others with a measure of ease, others never run out of hope. When these gifts we have been given by God come through us and touch others, we are doing what it is we have been called to do. We are following in the footsteps of Jesus. Not always perfectly, but to the very best of our ability.

Several years ago, I received a very thoughtful reflection, some of you might recognize, written by a woman named Oriah Mountain Dreamer. That is not her birth name. It was written following a disappointing party she had attended. It urges us to consider what gifts of strength and the spirit are at the heart of a person instead of just looking at what is on the surface.

The reflection is as follows. It is entitled “The Invitation.”

*It doesn't interest me what you do for a living.*

*I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare  
to dream of meeting your heart's longing.*

*It doesn't interest me how old you are. I want to know  
if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dream,  
for the adventure of being alive.*

*It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon.  
I want to know if you have touched the center of your own  
sorrow, if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have  
become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain.  
I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own,  
without moving to hide it or fade it or fix it.*

*I want to know if you can be with joy, mine, your own,  
If you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy  
Fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us  
to be careful, be realistic, to remember the limitations of being human.*

*It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true.  
I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself;  
if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul; if you can be  
faithless and therefore trustworthy.*

*I want to know if you can see beauty even when it's not pretty, every day, and if you can  
source your own life from its presence.*

*I want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine,  
And still stand on the edge of the lake and shout to the silver of the  
full moon, "Yes."*

*It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you  
have. I want to know if you can get up, after the night of  
grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone, and do what  
needs to be done to feed the children.*

*It doesn't interest me who you know or how you came to be here.  
I want to know if you will stand in the center of the fire with me and  
not shrink back.*

*It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied.  
I want to know what sustains you, from the inside, when all else falls away  
I want to know if you can be alone with yourself and if you truly like  
the company you keep in the empty moments.*

*Those are beautiful, thoughtful words that should help us reflect on the depth and meaning of our lives. What is it that matters within us and within those we meet? What is it that makes us special? What treasures do we all hold?*

Spiritual gifts are the sparks of life that keep us going in spite of earthquake, wind or fire or being buried under the rubble of life. They are what sustain us when we find ourselves bone weary, emotionally exhausted and psychologically flat. Spiritual gifts come from a Creator who loves us and expects the best from us when we serve the world around us.

Jesus found his early in his ministry following his baptism. We can find ours, too, as the early followers of Christ did, guided by the words of Paul. Once we discover what our special gifts are, we will learn that they are ours forever to share with all others.

*--Amen*