

What do you want from me GOD?

Individual and Corporate Service

One of the things I have observed as I have collected years is that I recall with nostalgia, many experiences from younger days while consistently forgetting what I am doing in the present! That said, it's nice to have a captive audience with whom to share a few memories that shaped my life and faith. In my sharing, I hope you will find a message for your faith journey.

Wednesday evenings were always very special to me as a little girl. One of my most special memories of my Dad was our Wednesday date night. Mom was an avid, skilled bridge player and Weds. was her evening to join her friends to play bridge. That meant Dad and I were on our own for dinner and sometimes a special treat. Our small town, Metropolis Illinois had several good restaurants, nothing fancy but good, homemade food. If there was a new movie at the Massac, our local theater, the extra special treat was going to a movie. Dad loved musicals, westerns and war movies — any movie that combined two or more of those genre was a sure thing for our “treat list.”

I was maybe 4 or 5 years old when I first saw *Singing in the Rain* and *American in Paris* with my Dad. I was entranced by the music and that began my introduction to talent. I loved the singing and dancing and fervently hoped that I had been given those talents. Even one would have been great!

In the meantime, years passed and I watched as friends learned to play the piano, tap dance, sing, perform in recitals —! In third grade my parents encouraged me to join the band and I learned the

rudiments of playing the clarinet and was a band member until the end of my junior year in high school. That was when the band director introduced the precision marching in formations while playing your instrument. I was consistently the one who was out of step or turned the wrong direction. So still no talent that was obvious! My attempts had resulted in being asked by the director of our Church choir - not to participate. And just as embarrassing, The Band Director pointed out to me privately that when I got distracted by the music I should pretend to play so it was not so obvious!! Both of these experiences convinced me that “TALENT” had eluded me. But actually, it wasn’t all bad! I learned that I loved listening to music and I enjoyed being part of a group. But — was that talent? It didn’t feel like it!!

In the same way that Wednesday evenings were date night with my Daddy, Sundays were for Sunday school and church. What lovely memories I have of Ella Mae Main. She was our Sunday School teacher from 1st thru 6th grade. She influenced my life in such a positive way. Mrs. Main was blond and so very pretty. To my young eyes, she was a great combination of June Allyson, Mitzi Gaynor, Debbie Reynolds and Grace Kelly. And — she always smelled sooo good. My Mom and Dad encouraged me to listen well in Sunday School, because Mrs. Main was really smart. She had gone to college and graduated from the University of Illinois. That was uncommon for my home town in that day and time. She graduated from high school in Metropolis and went to college during WWII. After graduation she became a teacher up north in a small town known for its white squirrels Olney Illinois. She moved home with her two little girls after her young husband died serving in the Korean War. After a while, she married a local businessman, had a

baby boy and devoted her life to her church, family and community. She was a Girl Scout leader, the first female elected to the School Board and served numerous roles in our church. According to my Mom, Ella Mae was good at everything. And you know – I never heard her sing or dance or display any of those traits I first thought were talent!

Ella Mae Main spoke softly and smiled as she taught. She explained things well and made Bible stories seem positively real. One Sunday she taught us about Jesus teaching the Parable of the Talents as found in Matthew 25. She was always careful to teach us the meanings of the Bible words. And she did this time — explaining that a Parable was “a short story used to teach a spiritual lesson or moral.”

She asked me to read the parable and I was scared but complimented. I used the method she had taught us to find the New Testament and found Matt.25: 14-30. (Demonstrate). And then, I used a “gift” I had been told I had, — I read the parable aloud to our class. We talked about the meaning of the parable and what lesson Jesus wanted us to get from the story. I admit that to this day I struggle with some of the details of that parable – like how harshly the fellow who dug a hole and hid his talent till his master’s return was treated! Maybe he was afraid to fail or unsure how to make the talent grow. At least he did not use it for a frivolous purchase for himself.

That said, I learned that “talent” was not always what I had thought it to be and the word could have different meanings. Most importantly – I think beyond what we had learned when we studied

the Ten Commandments — this parable was the first introduction I had to what God wants from me – from each of us!

In Romans we learn that “in his Grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. The second half of that book gives us an important commandment related to those talents: Use them!

The parable of the Talents and many other lessons learned in Sunday School and Church — and LIFE taught me that while some might have beautiful voices or other obvious talents like dance, drawing and painting, playing an instrument — God has blessed each of us with gifts – some talent or ability which he expects us to develop and use to help others and to his glory. I think it made me feel better that the parable and other scriptures acknowledged that not everyone is given “gifts” to the same degree — but each of us is expected to use what we are given.

In His sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught the parable about “light under a bushel.” The version of this story found in the 5th chapter of Matthew tells us that Jesus said: **No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. — Meaning that we should let our light shine in all we do to glorify God and share the Good News of his saving Grace! As a child I bet many of you, like me , sang the song “This little light of mine, I’ m gonna let it shine.**

Ella Mae Main — that wonderful Sunday School Teacher I mentioned earlier, taught us an additional lesson from that parable. She took a small lighted candle and set a small Jar over the lighted flame. In a very short time the flame died. Her point was pretty apparent to our group of 6 to 11 year olds. If you don't use your Gifts they go dormant doing, no one including yourself any good!

So what about these gifts ??? ::: John Calvin defined talents as gifts from God in the form of a person's calling or natural ability.

Published theologian Gene Wilkes defines a spiritual gift as an expression of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers which empowers them to serve the body of Christ, the church. Depending on the resource consulted the "gifts" are many and varied. They include gifts of: Leadership, Administration, Teaching, Knowledge, Wisdom, Prophecy, Discernment, Exhortation, Shepherding, Faith, Evangelism, Apostleship, Service, Mercy, Giving — and Hospitality.

Another source refers to Gifts of the Spirit as:

Wisdom, Understanding Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord. Individuals with those "gifts of the Spirit" were described as manifesting their gifts as Fruits of the Spirit : Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness and Self Control.

Is that what people see when they interact with us? Do they experience our Gifts from the Holy Spirit as Love , Joy, Peace patience kindness, goodness faithfulness and self control. If they

do not, then are we using our Gifts to glorify God as we are expected/commanded?

The best way to be a "good steward" of the gifts we have been given is to begin discovering or rediscovering, developing, and using those gifts to serve the Lord and bless others. If we are led by the Spirit and open to God's gifts, the fruits of the Holy Spirit will be evident in our lives – in our work, in the way we treat others and in the ways we serve the community of the church as the practical living out of the gift.

Did you see the E-chimes this week — a group of Gifted People gathered for a Feeding Friends project to prepare meals to be used for members of the congregation or people known by members to need help with meals during times of illness, recovery from surgery or even the arrival of a new baby. Were they each Master Chefs or trained nutritionists? No - some may come pretty close, but They were people displaying both the Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit! But remember we are gifted to different levels by the Holy Spirit ! Life offers us almost endless opportunities to do that!!!

Think about it ! What gifts did each of those people have who completed that project ? And what Fruits of the Spirit were apparent in their effort? Now look inwardly – how about you? Are you using the Gifts God has given you? Are you using them wisely and well ?

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus encouraged us to Live the Golden Rule when he said “ **Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even unto them.”**

Here at Hyde Park Presbyterian Church and in our near and distant community there are many ways we can and should serve. Think about those things that you have been told you do well, have discovered you do well, and or that you enjoy doing. Be alert to notices in the E-Chimes, church bulletin and from word of mouth. During this time of transition in our church as we seek an Interim Pastor and then a permanent Pastor the work of the church goes on. Remember the Church is not the building or the Pastor, it is the people – the congregation.

Soon you will be invited to assist with nominations for the Elder Nominating Committee and then to make nominations for a new class of Elders to serve on Session. Look around you. Nominate members of the congregation whose gifts you recognize as needed to continue the work of Hyde Park Presbyterian — and that includes yourself.

The Missions Ministry will soon be posting a schedule for monthly meetings and will welcome more hands and hearts to serve. We have consistently been a giving congregation to projects like End 68 Hours of Hunger, Guardian ad Litem Toy Drive, Beth el Ministries Mother’s Day Diaper drive and many other missions projects. Your gifts of hands on effort, your monetary support, and participation with all the preparations are all ways to serve.

Our Children's Ministry is seeking volunteers to help in the nursery - Soon we will have two new infants and caring caregivers can share the joy and the children will be enriched by the gifts of the Spirit you share.

Whatever your talents and gifts, big or small, apparent or subtle, when used to benefit others glorifies God and reflects his presence in your life. So ---- Think, Pray and Do!!

Now please bow your heads for the closing prayer:

God of love and life, all good things come from you. Help us take time to look deep within ourselves and discover the gifts with which you have blessed us. May we always be open to the direction of the Spirit and never forget the love you have for each of us. AMEN!

Hymn 391 - Take my Life

BENEDICTION:

And now – may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen

