

Gifted  
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
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**Psalm 8**

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.
- <sup>2</sup> Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.
- <sup>3</sup> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;
- <sup>4</sup> what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?
- <sup>5</sup> Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honor.
- <sup>6</sup> You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,
- <sup>7</sup> all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,
- <sup>8</sup> the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
- <sup>9</sup> O LORD, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

**John 16:12-15**

<sup>12</sup> I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Back in January, when I was training our ruling elders and deacons before the ordination and installation of our new officers, the idea was raised that others, who might not be active officers, might also find information from one of my resources of interest. That resource is a book called *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* by Joan S. Gray. The title is misleadingly dull for what the contents hold. What caught my attention most of all was Gray's metaphor of a rowboat church versus a sailboat church. She explains

a rowboat church this way: “The bedrock reality of life in the rowboat church is that God has given the church a basic agenda (for example, to make the world a better place...) and then left it up to the church to get on with it...Leaders in a rowboat church spend a large portion of their time focusing on such issues, and the key question becomes, ‘What can we do with what we have?’”<sup>1</sup>

And then there is the sailboat church: “the dominant attitude in a sailboat church is that ‘God can do more than we can ask or imagine.’ Its leaders know that what they have or lack in the way of human and material resources is not the decisive factor in what they can accomplish as a church.”<sup>2</sup> Of people who view their church as a sailboat church, she says: “They take this approach because they believe that the God who calls is also the God who provides, and that if they are invested in doing what God wants the church to do, God will provide the resources.”<sup>3</sup> If you needed any more invitation to shift from the rowboat to the sailboat, she writes: “When we start with a conviction about what God can do instead of focusing only on what we can do, church leadership becomes a spiritual adventure.”<sup>4</sup>

This summer, this Ordinary Time through Labor Day, I invite us to join in an adventure, to go for a sail with God filling our sails. Each week we’ll join Scripture with the scripturally-based *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers*, not only to hear how we are all called to be leaders but also to grow in listening for our leader, for our God. Today, the wisdom from Joan Gray is what you find on the front of your bulletin: “God raises up among the Christians in a congregation the gifts needed to carry on ministry in that place.”<sup>5</sup> Last week we celebrated Pentecost, the first giving of gifts from the Spirit. Paul expands on that story from Acts, saying, “To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of

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<sup>1</sup> Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 13.

tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”<sup>6</sup> Gray states: “Among the many gifts mentioned in Scripture are hospitality, generosity, teaching, preaching, administration, and healing. However, the Spirit is not limited to any particular list of gifts and is constantly at work in the congregation and beyond it, drawing and cultivating the particular gifts needed for mission and ministry there.”<sup>7</sup>

God’s generosity of gifts, of all kinds, is the foundation of our psalm of praise. “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.” Pastor Thomas W. Walker supports this saying: “...the psalmist confirms that God’s attention is gift ... humans literally ‘lack little from God,’ which is typically translated ... ‘made them little lower than God’ (NRSV).”<sup>8</sup> God’s attention is gift. Remember what Gray said about sailboat churches: “...they believe that the God who calls is also the God who provides.”<sup>9</sup> God’s attention is gift.

Of course, as individuals we might be more attentive to those times when God has gifted us than as a community of faith. Even I am susceptible to this – I can name the last time I noticed God’s gifts in my individual life, but I think about how God has gifted **us** less. But that is exactly the Pentecost story. The Spirit came to the community of believers, sent out the community of believers. Scholar Eugene C. Bay looks at our reading from John and observes the gathered group of Jesus’ followers and says “John is confident that, relying on the guidance of ‘the Spirit of truth,’ the community will be led where it needs to go.”<sup>10</sup> We take the gifts we have for ministry and we rely on the guidance of the Spirit. “What [we] have or lack in the way of human and material resources is not the decisive factor in what [we] can accomplish as a church.”<sup>11</sup> We bring what we have to the boat and God’s Spirit fills the sails. Professor Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll sums it up this way: “the Spirit acts as the

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

<sup>7</sup> Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 39.

conduit for the word of God for the community, guiding them in truth and pointing the community in the proper direction for the future.”<sup>12</sup>

This summer, let’s trim our sails to make the most of God’s Spirit blowing, with the words of Jesus charting our course. Our boats behind us are our reminder. The boats in front of me are yours to take as your own reminder. **We**, as community, have been gifted. How is God calling us, us as community, to use these gifts? Our spiritual adventure awaits us.

Let us pray: Come, Holy Spirit, fill our sails and guide our way, we pray. Amen.

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<sup>12</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, p. 47.