

*Our car is dying.
Turn left out of the Rectory on a cold morning,
and attempt to drive up Winterbourne hill
and half-way up it'll just give up the ghost.
Put your foot down on the accelerator, ask for "more" power and nothing happens.
I don't know what's going on:
its 'get up and go' has got up and gone.
its not firing on all cylinders,
its turbo-charge is asleep,
its hydraulic coupling has disconnected from the oscillating drive shaft –
I have no idea what I am talking about!
All I know is that when I want the power its not there.*

I guess the same can be true both for you and me and for churches
When we need the power it's not there...

We can do all the right things
we can pray, we can read our Bible, we can go to church
but somehow, we know deep inside, something is missing.
The energy, the drive, the dynamism which transforms people's lives is just not there.
So what's that all about?

Its nearly Christmas
You know when God became a human in Jesus
When he laid aside his power, his majesty, his knowledge, his supernatural attributes
he became like you and me.
The person of God with our abilities...
Si if you asked baby Jesus a question in Swahili - he would not have been able to understand you.
if you asked the boy Jesus to help you with your maths home-work he wouldn't have had a clue.
If you had asked the man Jesus to pick the winning lottery numbers for next week he wouldn't have been
able to do it.
Jesus was a man.
With no more power than you or me.

So you ask then
how did he turn water into wine?
how did he walk on water?
how did he know that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed 30 years later
The answer is simple: the Holy Spirit.
Jesus undertook his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.
His miracles, his wisdom, his supernatural abilities came from the Holy Spirit.

The person that gave Jesus the energy, the power, the dynamism in his ministry was God's Holy Spirit.

And therefore the reason why so many individuals and so many churches lack impact, lack power, lack dynamism is because they are not relying on the Holy Spirit the way Jesus did.
They are not using the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives the way Jesus did.
They are to all intents and purpose ignorant of the life and power that God has called them too.

So this evening and for the next few weeks we're going to be looking at power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our life and the life of Southover.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians

v1 Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.

He wrote it because

It IS possible to be a Christian and to be completely ignorant about the gifts of the Holy Spirit

It is possible for a church to try to minister without the Holy Spirit

But in both cases it'll feel like my car going up Winterbourne hill on a cold morning:

life-less, frustrating, slightly embarrassing and lacking in any power and conviction.

So this evening I want to talk about the Holy Spirit

- the Presence of God in our life

- the Provider of Gifts for our ministry

- the Power of God for our Church

And if you'd turn with me to p1153, to 1 Corinthians 12 we shall walk through this passage together...

The Holy Spirit

the Presence of God, the Provider of Gifts, the Power for change in our life

1. The Holy Spirit is the Presence of God for us

Paul writes...

v2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.

I guess there was a time in everybody's life when the things that mattered 'were things'.

They were the false gods, like money and sex and power and image and affirmation from others –

We wanted them – but they didn't give us real security, they didn't save us, they didn't communicate with us, they didn't love us

We wanted them.

We chased them

They commanded our attention

They took our time and occupied our dreams

And our life revolved around

but they were false gods they never delivered – nor could they

but then ...

if we are a Christian at some point we put our trust in Jesus

because he alone can satisfy those needs and answer our questions and

provide us with eternal security, purpose and love

That was how we were, **this** is how we are...

v3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

What Paul is saying is that

when we became a Christian we received the Holy Spirit.

No 'ifs', no 'buts', no 'maybe's'

When we become Christians, at the moment of salvation,

we're baptized, sealed, guaranteed the Holy Spirit to be with us forever.

God's presence, with us forever, for every Christian – no exceptions.

Now in the 20th Century when people rediscovered the place of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life

When people read 1 Corinthians 12 and actually believed it
When the, pretty much moribund church in England, rediscovered the power of the Holy Spirit presence
people (rightly) got excited ...
But an error crept into the church which said
that only certain Christians are baptised with the Holy Spirit and that other Christians aren't.

Now this wrong, it's dangerous, it's elitist, it's misguided and it is unscriptural.

The reason
why some Christians are on fire for God and others aren't
the reason why some Christians seem to be living in a dynamic relationship with the supernatural and others
seem to be doing it in their own strength.
is not because some Christians have the Holy Spirit and others don't
That is rubbish theology.

The truth is we all have the Holy Spirit,
we have all been baptised by the Holy Spirit.

The word – Baptism means to plunge. Literally to plunge.
So imagine, I take a sponge – a bath sponge
and imagine it is dry and unyielding
but then I plunge into some water

At the moment I plunge it into the water, at that moment – it is baptised
it is in the water, it is surrounded by the water, it is covered by the water,
But – if I took it out, straight away, the inside would still be as dry as a bone.

Why?
Because the water hasn't been allowed to penetrate it
although IT is in the water, the water is only partially in it.

But leave the sponge in the water,
let it yield to the water,
let the water soften it,
let the water percolate fully into it,
and THEN take it out
well then from it, streams of water will flow.
When the sponge yields – not only is IT in the water but the water is fully in IT

You and me, if we're Christians
We have been baptised by the Holy Spirit
We are in the Holy Spirit, he covers us, surrounds us, protects us

But that's not the end of it –
now we must fully yield to him
we must give our life, our trust, our hopes, our ambitions to him
not only in theory but in reality
not only with our lips but with our life
not only on Sunday but every day

If we are to live the life that God wants for us
then we need to
live in his presence
affirm his welcome
let his guidance, his holiness percolate ALL of our life.

Some people say “I don’t know if I have the Holy Spirit.”

Well, you *can* know!

Do you want to love Jesus?

Have you asked him to be your Lord and God and Saviour?

Do you want Him to be above all else?”

yes? Well then you are a Christian,

and if you are a Christian then you have the Holy Spirit.

So don’t let anyone look down on you and

don’t look down on yourself

Now let his presence fill you

let his presence become more and more real

share your life, your hopes, your ambitions with him

and then SEE what a difference he will make...

The Holy Spirit is the Presence of God in all of us.

And if you have claimed him as Lord then he IS in you

now, let him have, **let him BE Lord** of all of you.

Firstly, the Holy Spirit is the Presence on God in all of us.

2. Secondly, the Holy Spirit is the Provider of Gifts for all of us

v4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

v5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

v6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

What Paul is saying is that when we become Christians we are given a gift by God (the Spirit v4, the Son v5, the Father v6) together in agreement to do ministry.

We are all given Spiritual Gifts.

Now here’s the question

2.1 What is the difference between a Spiritual Gift and a Natural Talent?

They both come from God.

They both grow as you use them,

They are both for the good of others

So what is the distinction?

Well, Natural Talents are given to everyone at birth (regardless of whether they believe in God or not)
Spiritual Gift’s are given when people become Christians.

When we’re born – God gives us a whole host of natural talents and abilities which need to be discovered and trained.

When we’re born again – when we become a Christian - the Holy Spirit gives us at least one ability to do ministry like Jesus which also needs to be discovered and trained.

Now these things are not the same

A Natural Talent need not have any spiritual dimension at all - we can exercise it without God –
but a Spiritual Gift is specifically given to have Spiritual impact and it is **only** something that works in partnership with God.

So

a natural talent is the result of our natural birth

a spiritual gift is the result of our spiritual rebirth.

a natural talent can be possessed by anyone,

a spiritual gift is for Christians

a natural talent can be effective in our own strength
a spiritual gift is effective only in partnership with God

a natural talent has a worldly impact
a spiritual gift has a spiritual impact

It is a powerful Holy Spirit given ability to do ministry like Jesus.

And as with anything powerful there are many ways of getting it wrong and getting hurt.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says "give a foolish man an electric chainsaw with both hands and he will give it back to you with only one"

Actually I made that up – but you get the drift!

So let me give you 5 rights and 5 wrong associated with Spiritual Gifts

The first "right" is that every Christian has at least one Spiritual Gift.

v7 "now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good"

To each one (not to some, not to most, not to everyone but you) ... to each one, to every Christian here – God has given a gift.

So the error we can make is to believe that we have nothing to offer, because God hasn't given us a gift – that's wrong because 'he has' and 'you do'.

God has given every Christian here (no matter how old or how young) something unique for you to do, **someone** that only you can touch to make a difference in this world.

everyone has been given by God at least one gift.

The second 'right' is that no one has ALL the gifts

v8 to one there is given through the Spirit this gift, to another that gift

So no-one has **all** the gifts

Which is why it is an error to think or expect that the Vicar, the Curate, the Youth Minister or anyone in leadership is all-competent.

We expect too much when we think someone who is ordained needs to be a great Pastor, a great Preacher, a great Leader, a great Administrator, a great Teacher, a great church-planter and a great anything else...

No one has all the gifts.

No one is so completely rounded that they do not have weaknesses and that they can do everything well.

God has designed us so that we cover for each others deficiencies.

We play to each other's strengths.

So everyone has at least one gift

no-one has all the gifts

Thirdly, no single gift is for everyone.

Some people think that the gift of tongues, for example, is for everyone.

Some Pentecostal Churches go further and say unless you have the gift of tongues you have not been baptised in the Holy Spirit.

This is both childish and foolish

Look at v29.

Pauls says

Are all apostles? – answer: "no, not everyone is an Apostle

Are all prophets? – "no, not everyone is a Prophet

Are all teachers? No

Do all work miracles? No

Do all have gifts of healing? No
Do all speak in tongues? No!
Do all interpret?... No.

I just don't see how Christians who read the Bible can think tongues are an exception –

v12 the body is made up of many parts

We are not the same... we're supposed to be different

And to expect people to have the gift that we have, so that they are like us, just forces people into needless guilt and misses the point.

No single gift is for everyone.

Everyone has at least one gift

no-one has all the gifts

no single gift is for everyone.

Fourthly we are all called to serve outside of our gifting.

Just because it isn't my gifting doesn't mean to say that I shouldn't volunteer to do it.

Look, a friend comes to you and says "would you tell me about Jesus?"

We don't say "Well no, because I don't have the gift of teaching – ask David!"

They say "but I want to become a Christian"

We don't say "well that's too bad because I don't have the gift of evangelism either so you're just going to have to go to hell!"

We can't do that.

Amanda says to me "Steve I'd like a cup of tea"

I can't say "well I'm afraid that I don't have the gift of hospitality – make your own tea" –

I can't say that, I tried it and I ended up wearing it !

We can't say I'm the preacher I don't tidy up the church

I'm a worship leader I don't wash up

I'm an administrator I can't do crèche!

we are all called to serve wherever there is a need because we're a family

and in a family when you see something that needs doing you do it –

you don't complain, you don't wait around until your mum or dad gets round to it –

you see something needs doing you do it.

That's what family is all about.

everyone has at least one gift

no-one has all the gifts

no single gift is for everyone.

we are all called to serve outside our gifting

and finally – no-one's gift 'sucks'

don't be jealous of other people's gifts for

v11 God gives gifts to each one, just as he determines.

So we can't act like a spoilt child who opens their Christmas present and says "that's not what I want."

*Oh Jesus you gave me the gift of Administration and what
I wanted was the gift of prophecy so I could denounce people's sin at church
I wanted the gift of leading worship so that I could be like a rock star or
I wanted the gift of tongues so I could stand up and say "yabba dabba do" and people would say 'Amen'.
But you gave you the gift of Administration – pout lips!*

No gift sucks.

God knows what he wants from us, and what wants from us is for us to become like Jesus, a servant who washed his disciples feet.

God knows what he is doing.

So my friend

As you sit here tonight God has given you a gift – you need to find out what it is and how to exercise it

You and God are in partnership together

The Holy Spirit is God's Presence in you

He is the Provider of Gifts to you; and

3. He is the Power to change the World through you.

v7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

The Holy Spirit gives you gifts to do ministry like Jesus.

You can pray like Jesus, you can care like Jesus, you can touch people like Jesus because any and all ministry that is effective is done through the power of God's Spirit – just like Jesus.

And as you use your gifts 3 things happen.

3.1 Firstly, your faith will get stronger

Have you noticed that anything that uses power – heats up?

Any thing that even has power passing through it – warms up

The transformer for your Computer is warm even when the computer is off

Overhead power-cables are warm (although I don't suggest you check that one out)

Our lap-top batteries get warm as we use them.

Anything that does work (including you and me) gets warm.

And so as we use our gifts our own faith warms up.

if we want to be on fire for God – serve!

if we want our faith to grow – serve!

if we want God to make difference in our life - serve!

Do you think Moses, the most reluctant leader in the history of God's people, didn't have a **stronger faith** – after he had been used by God to rescue his people?

Do you think Gideon, who was hiding through fear from the Philistines, didn't have a stronger faith after God used him to beat them?

Do you not think Peter, the one who feared to be known as a Christ follower was stronger after his first sermon?

You want to know your purpose, your meaning, your place in this world – serve

You will not only see God's blessing in your own life

But you will also see that your life is a blessing for others.

God has given you a gift for the church – but he has also given you as a gift to the church.

You are a gift to Southover,

Your presence is God's gift to us

So secondly, not only will your faith get stronger,

3.2 But our faith, through you will get stronger too.

As you teach (as you spend week in week out at Sunday Club) other people learn.
As you encourage, other people run further and faster
As you organise, you help and things get done that otherwise wouldn't get done
As you serve coffee friendships are made

Whatever the capacity God has given you,
he has sent you here on divine mission as a gift to us
We need you, and you need us, and we all need each other,
to become the church that does ministry like Jesus,

because when we do this
not only are we a blessing for ourselves,
not only are we a blessing for each other,
but thirdly

3.3 we are also a blessing for those outside of our community.

The most powerfully attractive force for the gospel that I know is a community on fire for God.

One night the building of a pretty half-hearted church caught on fire.

The blaze lit up the sky and attracted people from all around.

A member of the church saw someone who had been totally indifferent to Christianity who had come to watch – they said

"I've never seen YOU come near this church before."

"No," they replied "but then I've never seen this church on fire before either."

So let me land with this...

If you're a Christian and you're here tonight and you've been **hanging out on the fringe** (regardless of whether you are younger or older, new to the church or established)

God has given you a role to play and gift to use.

The church has been likened to a football match where lots of people in desperate need of exercise are watching twenty two people in desperate need of a rest.

There are people here having heart-attacks because they are so busy trying to do everything that needs doing.
If you want your faith to grow, if you want to see God's Kingdom come
you are a role to play and gift to use

As we grow and expand,
as we try to introduce a new service in the morning,
as we think about launching a town-centre town-wide ministry
every one of you is here is on divine appointment to use your gift.

When we use our gifts together, when we fire on all cylinders, when we have no resemblance to my car going up Winterbourne hill – we will be vitally attractive

Paul said

vI Now about Spiritual Gifts - I don't want you to be ignorant

find your gift (Chris will talk about that next week), join us (talk to me or David or Jeremy or Chris about what you can do), make a difference

Be a partner with God's Holy Spirit so that we can do ministry like Jesus, to the glory of God

That is why you are here.