

Ellie Burge

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When I was 3 months off turning five, my father died suddenly in the middle of the night of a heart attack. This had a significant impact on me; I was a child that was very fearful of going to sleep in case someone I loved wasn't there when I woke in the morning.

My greatest bedtime memory of these years was Mum lying next to me, firstly telling me her made up magical stories about fairies and elves and then as I grew older, these were replaced with poetry. Mum was always an avid reader and she had a head full of memorised poems from the old masters.

My favourite was, *There Was a Sound of Revelry by Night – The Eve of the Battle of Waterloo* by Lord Byron. As Mum recited it in the dark, it both scared me and enchanted me with the wonderful images and I would beg, "Say it again, Mum"

And even to this day I can remember most of it by heart and more importantly, I can hear my Mum's voice reciting it. – So here are the first two verses;

*There was a sound of revelry by night,
And Belgium's capital had gathered then
Her beauty and her chivalry, and bright
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men;
A thousand hearts beat happily; and when
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,
Soft eyes looked love to eyes which spake again,
And all went merry as a marriage-bell;
But hush! hark! a deep sound strikes like a rising knell!*

*Did ye not hear it? --No; 'twas but the wind,
Or the car rattling o'er the stony street;
On with the dance! let joy be unconfined;
No sleep till morn, when Youth and Pleasure meet
To chase the glowing Hours with flying feet.
But hark! that heavy sound breaks in once more,
As if the clouds its echo would repeat;
And nearer, clearer, deadlier than before!
Arm! arm! it is--it is--the cannon's opening roar!*

Through her love of poetry and language Mum gave me a wonderful gift, the appreciation of poetry and the power of words to fire my imagination.

Our readings this morning have been about spiritual gifts and it is so important we recognize that everyone has gifts, whether or not they label them as spiritual.

What is a gift? A gift is something we give for the benefit of another or others and we know this to be true when we have found ourselves on the receiving end of a gifting. As parents or grandparents we give pride of place to our child/grandchild's art work of Mum or Granddad with purple eyes and orange teeth. Its value to us is way beyond that of that of a Dick Frizzell or Andy Warhol famous art work – for we value the intention of the child's gift – it says; 'I love you and this shows how much'.

Each and everyone one of us receive and share gifts on a daily basis and it would be short-sighted of us if we were to separate out the gifts people of faith acknowledge as spiritual or God given gifts, from those gifts we feel are everyday skills and talents.

There are people with the gift of hospitality expressed through food. They love to prepare a meal with the intention of sharing it with others around the dining table or delivering it to someone in need; a new mum, a birthday surprise, someone recovering from illness or dealing with grief.

There are creative people who share their gift of music, art or writing, with the intention of bringing us joy, solace or understanding, or challenging us to look at the world in a different way.

There are those with hard earned skills; - doctors and nurses who share their gift of medical knowledge to the benefit of all those in need of care and healing.

There are engineers who gift us their knowledge of building structures and road cambers, with the intention of keeping us safe in our homes and on the road.

And of course, importantly. those with the gift of affirmation and friendship. I am sure we all have those friends, those people in our lives who, regardless of our life circumstances, how we feel about ourselves or, the mood we may be projecting, are always there to love and affirm us,- our humanness, our reason for being

Whenever I go to share at local churches I always feel welcomed by the congregation. They forgive me my muck-ups, they laugh with me, and on those Sunday's, I feel encouraged and appreciated. I am always grateful for this very special gift.

As a faith community it is important we acknowledge the gifts of others, while not forgetting our own gifts, and as our faith is important to us, we will see God's spirit working in an integral way through each and every one of us.

If you are not sure or don't recognize what your own gifts are, you only have to ask someone who knows you well what they believe your gift/s to be. Like a mirror, others reflect back to us how they see us and what gifts they have received from us.

I came to realise I had a gift of insight or perception when working in the field of intellectual disability and challenging behaviour. As a member of a social work team I would quietly listen to all the group discussion around a particular client and when the discussion appeared over, I would bring my own ideas to the table, garnered from all the input, but with my own perspective. This was mostly greeted with a positive acknowledgement and often a change to possible interventions. This gift came from an ability to listen to and reflect on all the arguments and points of view before entering the discussion. I didn't think anything of this until others in the group began to acknowledge it as a positive contribution to the organisational dynamic.

It is so important to acknowledge our own gifts whilst not being envious of the gifts of others. I am so very pleased there are people in our world with magnificent singing voices for it is definitely not one of my gifts, but I do have a gift of using my voice to share knowledge and understanding of many aspects of life, just not singing!

We are told in 1Corinthians12: *There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so we*

are formed into one body. It didn't matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink. So the body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts.

If we think of a high school, it is not made up of only Chemistry teachers, or just English or History teachers. If the intention of the school is to offer a broad, comprehensive education to students, it must recognize the value of many separate subjects, and then integrate each teachers' different skills/gifts into the curriculum. But for a school to run effectively and efficiently it also needs those who are administrators, with their skills/gifts of; leadership, financial management, rostering of staff, caring for the buildings and grounds or on the Board of Trustees. Each school community must not only acknowledge, but utilise wisely, the gifts, the skills and talents of all its members to fulfil its intention of providing a full and broad education to all its students.

Our church community is no different. Around the country many church congregations are becoming smaller, but you can see they have the gift of tenacity, they are not giving up. They meet each Sunday, warmly welcoming the different folk who come to share a message. At present this is the circumstance of St Paul's. You are in that interim period between farewelling the old and preparing to welcome a new parish minister, and so a time for everyone's gifts to be recognised and nurtured as you work through the process.

St Paul's is what it is because of the totality of gifts that are within this congregation. The greatest gift is your presence here and commitment to your church. Among you are those who gift administrative skills, some who happily share their message, those who gift time and energy caring for the grounds and buildings, and those with musical gifts. The gift of hospitality is apparent when abundant harvests are shared, sweet treats are gifted and people gather to share their stories. You surround those in pain and join with others in celebration of a special event. You care for each other within this congregation and also for others in our wider community. These gifts are apparent in your care of those who feel they are on the fringes of society through to the bringing of joy and giggles to new parents and pre-schoolers' – each of you bring your own special gifts to that wide range of caring.

Never believe you don't have gifts to share with others, your very presence here this morning is a gift to us all. As we go into our week, let each of us celebrate and carry with us the important message in our reading; *All kinds of things are gifted by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful. One spirit works all these things in each of them individually, as he sees fit.*