Sermon Summary: Working Gifts

Cultivating a Life Rooted in Christ

Rev. Jonathan Murray

November 15, 2026

In this message, Rev. Jonathan Murray challenged the congregation to move beyond merely recognizing their spiritual gifts and begin actively using them in service to God and others. Building on previous messages in the Cultivating a Life Rooted in Christ series, he reminded us that gifts, like seeds, contain tremendous potential, but that potential remains unrealized unless it is planted, nurtured, and put to work.

Drawing from Matthew 9-10, the sermon focused on Jesus' compassion for the crowds. Jesus saw people who were weary, vulnerable, and in need, and His compassion moved Him to action. Rev. Murray emphasized that biblical compassion is not simply a feeling but a response that leads to service. Jesus told His disciples that "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few," and then immediately sent those very disciples into ministry. Followers of Christ are not called merely to observe God's work but to participate in it.

A key theme of the sermon was the progression from disciple to apostle. The disciples first learned from Jesus, watched His ministry, and grew in faith. Then Jesus sent them out to continue His work. In the same way, Christians are called not only to learn about Jesus but to live like Jesus, serving as agents of God's healing, reconciliation, and hope in the world.

Rev. Murray also connected Jesus' teaching with 1 Peter's call to use our gifts as faithful stewards of God's grace. Every believer has been given unique gifts, experiences, abilities, and opportunities. These gifts are not meant to be admired, compared, or hidden away. They are given so that we may serve one another. Whether through teaching, listening, organizing, hospitality, encouragement, music, caregiving, or simple acts of presence, every gift becomes a visible expression of God's grace.

One of the sermon's most powerful ideas was the call to "speak life." Reflecting on Jesus' command to "raise the dead," Rev. Murray noted that while few of us will literally raise the dead, many people experience forms of death in everyday life: the death of hope, confidence, dignity, relationships, or community. Christians participate in Christ's life-giving ministry when they offer encouragement, speak truth, defend the vulnerable, pursue reconciliation, and remind others of their worth as people created in God's image.

The central message was simple but profound: God's miracles often occur through ordinary people who faithfully use the gifts God has entrusted to them. Jesus calls His followers to encourage the discouraged, welcome the lonely, comfort the hurting, include the excluded, and bring hope where despair exists. When believers put their gifts to work, they become instruments of God's compassion and part of God's ongoing work in the world.

Key Takeaway:
God has given every Christian gifts for a purpose. We are called not merely to possess those gifts but to use them, serving others, speaking life, and becoming active participants in Christ's mission of healing, hope, and restoration.

Transcript

As you're able, please remain standing for the reading of the gospel as it comes from Matthew chapter 9 starting at verse 35.

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, Jesus had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus said to his followers, there are many people to harvest, but only a few workers to help harvest them. Pray to the Lord who owns the harvest that he will send more workers to gather his harvest. Then Jesus summoned his 12 disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the 12 apostles. First, Simon, also known as Peter, as Brother Andrew. James son of Zebedee and his brother John, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector, James son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus, Simon the Canaanian, Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him. These 12 Jesus sent out with the following instructions. Do not take a road leading to Gentiles and do not enter a Samaritan town but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news. The kingdom of heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with a skin disease, cast out demons. You received without payment, give without payment.

This is the word of the Lord. God is still speaking.

Please be seated. I was in a conversation with a colleague the other day, and in response to one of my conclusions that I made, my colleague said, wow, that would take a miracle. A miracle. Do you believe in miracles? Glad to hear that. We usually define miracles as extraordinary events, things that happen when God intervenes in ways that cannot be easily explained. We tend to think of the parting of the Red Sea as the Hebrew people approached it. We think of the walls of Jericho come crumbling down when the blast of the shofars were sounded. We think of Jesus feeding the thousands with five bread loaves and two fish or walking on the Sea of Galilee. But those miracles, they're safely tucked away in scripture from centuries ago. That was then, this is now. Which is unfortunate because we live in a world in desperate need of some divine intervention. Yes? We look at the challenges of the world around us and we think, wow, that would take a miracle. But what if we misunderstood something about miracles? What if God's divine intervention continues through ordinary people who put their gifts to work. Now throughout our sermon series, Cultivate a Life in Christ, we've considered what it means to promote a life that reflects Jesus. We began with rhythm and balance, recognizing our need to rest and reconnect with God. We explored the priorities and boundaries, simplicity and financial wisdom, learning

to be intentional about what directs our lives and how we use what God has entrusted to us. We consider generosity, commitment, and community, recognizing that following Jesus shapes our relationships, our decisions, and our willingness to share. And last week, we highlighted the gifts God has given each of us, those abilities, experiences, passions through which God works for the common good. But what if, like that little gift, What if we leave it safely tucked in that bag? We just set it on the shelf and just let it stay there. What if we never use the gifts that God has given us? Is it any good? A seed contains the potential to become a flourishing plant. But if it's not planted, if it's not nurtured, that seed's potential remains unrealized. And the same is true of the gift that God has placed within you. within us. How are we putting to use the gifts that God has given us? Well, in Matthew's gospel, Jesus travels through these different cities and villages. He's teaching. He's proclaiming the good news. He's healing those who suffer and He's curing diseases. Matthew tells us something about what motivates Jesus. When Jesus sees the crowd, He has compassion because they are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. That Greek word translated compassion is splagnizomai, which is this profound gut-level reaction that moves someone from the depths of their being. Jesus doesn't see an inconvenience. He doesn't see people who should have worked harder or made better decisions. He sees human beings made in the image and likeness of God hurting, exhausted, vulnerable. and in need of hope. And his splegnizomai, his compassion, moves him to action. Jesus demonstrates that compassion becomes meaningful only when it is moved and put into action. And then Jesus tells his disciples, the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. He instructs them to pray for more workers. Jesus sees this tremendous need and tells his disciples to pray for more workers and then sends the very 12 that he is told to pray for more workers. Now at the beginning of chapter 10 of Matthew, Jesus summons these 12 disciples and gives them authority to participate in that ministry of restoration. But it's interesting in back-to-back verses, Jesus calls these 12 by two different titles. First, Jesus calls them disciples, this word methetes, which means learner or student. But then for those very same 12, Jesus uses the word apostolos or apostles, meaning one who is sent. Do you see the progression that's happened there? They've been learning from Jesus, listening to His teachings, watching His actions, and discovering what it looks like to participate in God's kingdom. From what they have seen and learned, Jesus sends them to participate in the very work they have witnessed. They move from learning about Jesus to living like Jesus. And that is what we have been exploring in this series. Cultivating a life in Christ is not simply about becoming more knowledgeable about Scripture or more disciplined in spiritual practices. Those things matter. but they are preparing us to participate in what God is already doing in the world. And listen to Jesus' words again. As you go, proclaim the good news, the kingdom of heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with a skin disease, and cast out demons.

Jesus speaks not in suggestions, but in imperatives. It's the language of command. It's your mother saying, go clean your room. It's not a suggestion. And Jesus goes on to say, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those considered unclean and cast out the forces that torment people. And then Jesus adds, you received without payment, so give without payment. That Greek word Dorian means freely or as a gift. What Jesus has entrusted to His followers is not something that they or we have earned. It's grace. And because they have received grace freely, they are to share it freely. Matthew is describing a particular mission that is entrusted to Jesus' disciples, and the larger call to participate in God's healing and reconciling work continues through the church today. And this is where the reading from 1 Peter becomes especially important. Peter writes, like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift you have received. That Greek word charismata, now we looked at that word last week. It's the gift of grace. Paul uses a form of diacono meaning to serve or minister. So Peter here is not saying, admire your gifts. or put them on display for others to see. Don't compare your gifts with others and don't wait to become an expert until you use those gifts. Serve one another. Put your gifts to work. Peter describes God's grace as varied or multicolored grace. And I love that image, especially looking around the stained glass windows. You see the light coming through and it's varied in color. God's grace takes shape through different people, different personalities, different abilities, different opportunities. Some teach and some listen. Some organize. Some work quietly behind the scenes. Some speak before crowds. Others communicate through a handwritten card or a meal or a helping hand. Some sing, some ring. But all are expressions of God's grace. Imagine someone who's recently lost a loved one. For weeks, the community of faith surrounds them with calls and cards and visits, but eventually life returns to normal for everyone except the person who is grieving. Several weeks later, a church member calls and says, I've been thinking about you. Would you like some company? They sit together. No attempt to explain away the grief. No expectation that the person should suddenly be better or healthy. just being present. No supernatural miracle has occurred, but through that simple gift of presence a life-giving gift was given. Someone who felt forgotten had been reminded that they matter. That is a gift being put to work. Peter calls us to maintain constant love, to practice hospitality, to serve one another, and to serve as people entrusted with God's words. everyday ways of making God's grace visible. But there's something in Matthew's account that makes me at least uncomfortable, and I would suspect you, and I really don't want to skip it. Did you catch it in those imperatives that I was reading off? Jesus tells his followers, raise the dead. Does that make you uncomfortable? It's not one that I've ever done. not literally. In fact, I went back and I looked through seminary course guides at Austin Seminary where I graduated. I looked at Iliff School of Theology, I looked at Denver Seminary, and I went and explored some of the more evangelical seminaries. Nowhere did I see a course entitled Introduction to Raising the

Dead. The author of the gospel according to Matthew describes Jesus giving his disciples extraordinary authority, but his command also invites us to consider the many ways people experience something like death long before physical life ends. There's the death of confidence when someone is repeatedly told they are worthless. There's the death of hope when poverty or illness or grief makes the future seem impossible. The death of dignity when people are treated as though their lives matter less than another. There's the death of relationships when resentment replaces reconciliation. And the death of community when fear and suspicion replaces compassion and trust. Obviously not physical death, but life is diminished. And perhaps one way Jesus' followers today participate in His life-giving ministry is through something we can do very simply. We can speak life. Think about the power of words. A child struggles in school and begins to believe they aren't smart enough until someone says, I see how hard you're trying. I believe you can do this. Words that begin to restore confidence. A person struggling with addiction hears, your past does not determine your future. You are worthy of love. Words that offer hope. A neighbor is ridiculed because of their background or orientation or identity. Someone speaks up, that person deserves the same dignity and respect. They are made in the image and likeness of God. Words that speak life. And speaking life often means speaking truth when silence would be easier. It means challenging injustice, defending someone being mistreated, refusing to participate in gossip, working toward reconciliation. Speaking life is not about saying something nice. Speaking life is using our words and our actions to extend that gift of God's grace. It's in verse 11 out of 1 Peter 4. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God. No pressure. Imagine how our conversations would change if we took those words seriously. How would our words change if before we speak we consider, will these words restore dignity or diminish it? Will they encourage reconciliation or deepen division? Will they reflect the compassion of Jesus? Christian artist Toby Mac has a song called Speak Life. Has anybody heard it? A couple of hands, I'm impressed. Good. It reminds us that our words can speak hope and love even in someone's darkest moments. Toby Mac sings, Some days life feels perfect. Other days, it just ain't working. The good, the bad, the right, the wrong, and everything in between. Though it's crazy amazing, we can turn a heart with the words we say. Mountains crumble with every syllable. Hope can live or die. So speak life. Speak life. To the deadest, darkest night. Speak life. When the sun won't shine and you don't know why, look into the eyes of the brokenhearted. Watch them come alive as soon as you speak hope, you speak love, you speak life. We may not solve every problem, cure every illness, or remove every burden, but we can refuse to become another voice of condemnation in a world already filled with words that diminish. We can speak life when others see despair, dignity when others seek to humiliate, reconciliation when others encourage division, and compassion when the world insists on judgment. We can speak life-giving words into action. Jesus looked at the crowd and He was moved with

compassion. He told His disciples to pray for more workers and then sent them into the world as apostles. And He tells us, encourage the discouraged, welcome the lonely, comfort the hurting, include the excluded, defend the oppressed, speak life to the hopeless. Because when we do, we're not simply talking about the love of Christ. We're putting that love to work. That's how the gift inside each of us are supposed to work. That's how through God's grace we participate in God's divine intervention to be one of life's miracles. Amen.