

## *Gift Wrapped*

1 Corinthians 12:13-31a

First Trinitarian Congregational Church UCC

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Copy Edited by Barbara Pfizenmaier

It's been quite a week. Late Monday afternoon our dear friend, the Rev. Wally Cedarleaf died, released from a body that was no longer able to hold him. In my brief time as pastor here, I saw glimpses of the man he was when he had his full energies. Before he retired, Wally was the Seaport Chaplain of Boston Harbor, where he would board ships from all over the world to speak and pray with seamen. I wouldn't have a clue about how to go about a ministry like that; Wally loved every minute of it.

The next evening, Attorney General, Martha Coakley, once regarded as a "shoe in" for Senator Kennedy's seat, conceded to Senator-elect Scott Brown. As such races go, it wasn't even close. Fingers have been pointing wildly, and everyone has an opinion about what Brown's victory means. Two things are clear: 1) he ran an excellent campaign; and 2) right now he's the world's most famous junior senator. The rest will unfold.

On Wednesday I learned of Robert B. Parker's death. Parker wrote crime mysteries; he created a character named "Spenser," whose true love, Susan, was the world's most perfect woman. Parker wrote about 23 novels in addition to the 37 Spenser novels. I've read every Spenser book and most of the others as well. The Christmas, when my children were all in Georgia with my ex-wife, and I would be spending the day entirely by myself, I had kept a Spenser novel to keep me company; it worked like a charm. I have tried to soak up Robert Parker's way of writing dialogue because he was without a peer on that score. More than once, I've thought about doing an adult ed course on the theology of Spenser – unpacking his understanding of good and evil, right and wrong, love, loyalty, strength and weakness, grace and judgment. Parker died in a way that befitted him; he was writing at his desk in his Cambridge home. Parker was 77. Spenser will not die, but he will have no more adventures.

On Saturday morning I attended my first Appalachian Service Project workshop in which the young people made bird houses which local artists will paint as part of their fund-raising activities. I watched adults and

youth working easily together under Rich Ferguson's flawlessly organized leadership. One girl was swinging a hammer with confidence. I said, "Gee, you're good!" She happily informed me that she'd gone on the ASP trip last summer; they'd built a deck. She had good reason to be pleased with herself.

People have so many different gifts – have you noticed?

My father was a watch maker when I was young. For you younger folks, in the days before watches had batteries, a watch maker was the person who took watches apart, fixed them, and put them back together. The springs and tiny gears in watches would stop working once the lubricating oil dried up. If the last watchmaker was just a little bit too generous with the oil, the oil would collect dust, gum up and the watch would stop.

My Dad had the best hands of any human being I've ever met. They didn't shake. Not even a little. Just for fun, he made a few ships in bottles – perfectly, of course. He took a course and became a hand engraver. He learned to repair gold and silver jewelry such that you couldn't tell where it had been fixed. He could draw and paint with photographic accuracy.

It was hard to be the son of a father with hands like that. Dad was patient. He'd read the directions three times before beginning anything. I preferred to figure it out on my own. Mistakes would be made.

When I was around 40, I decided it would be fun to build a model sailboat and put a remote control unit in it to turn the rudder and trim the sails. I had no kit. No directions. I knew nothing about sailboat design. I bought a magazine that had a photo of the "Endeavor" – one of the few surviving "J" boats from the 1930's America's Cup races. I drew some lines on a piece of paper. I cut out a series of ribs from 1/4" foam core board, then hot-glued 1/4" strips of balsa to them. Once the hull was formed I added some automobile repair fiberglass on top of the balsa and sanded it smooth. I filled the bathtub up with water, melted lead on the kitchen stove, and poured it into the keel while I

held the hull in the water with my other hand. That part was a bit unnerving. During vacation Dad and I worked for days finishing it up.

Finally we put it in the water. The mast snapped. Immediately. We made a bigger mast. It bent. We doubled the number of shrouds. The string we used stretched too much and down it came. We went to the fish and game store and discovered some braided polyester fish line that promised not to stretch. The mast stayed up, but the rudder was too small. We enlarged it. Toward the end of the week I lamented that I couldn't be more more like Dad, whose projects always turned out so perfectly. He said, "You do things I could never do. I have to go by the plans. You make the plans up in your head. I can't do that." I'd never thought about it that way. Then I explained a way I thought we could make some removable spreaders for the mast, and off we went. At the time, I had no idea there was a whole world of remote control sailboats out there; there was even a paperback book about how to build one. After making every conceivable mistake and fixing them, I actually read that book and concluded they pretty much had it right. But, I'd had so much fun making it all up that I had no regrets.

God has made us all different from one another. You've noticed, I'm sure.

Last night I was sitting in my chair writing and re-writing this fine little sermon, and my favorite wife wandered in and said once again, "Would you read my sermon?" I told her to go away – lovingly, of course. I had problems of my own. When the temperature dropped so fast that icicles began forming on the ceiling, I caved. Lovingly. She needs to talk about her sermons. I need to be left alone. We are not the same.

Paul said, "Look. You think some people are more important and some people are less important. Forget it. Everyone is important; and everyone is different. Only when all of us come together and all of us exercise our gifts – only then do we become the body of Christ in the world.

I am well aware that the minister is important in the life of the church. But when you're the minister, you are keenly aware that nearly everything in the church's life depends upon the people in the congregation. If I have an idea, the church is quite willing for me to run with it. And almost always it will fail. But when an

idea comes from the congregation, and the congregation runs with it, and I become the chief cheerleader – it may not work every time, but the success rate is vastly higher!

And why is that? Because when things come up from the community, they are sifted through the gifts of many people, and the people with the right gifts wind up running with it.

I'm more or less a word guy. If there were no "action" people around, nothing would ever get done. I'm not knocking words, we need words – good words, creative words, inspiring words, challenging words. But words alone will not do it. For a church to function it takes music, and money, and building repairs, and cleaning, and childcare, and teaching, and planning, and printing, and counting, and debating, and shoveling, and cooking, and wrapping, and organizing, and conversationalists, and the list goes on and on.

A parishioner once said, "I am an all or nothing guy. If the windshield washer is broken, the whole car is broke. That's how I am."

I secretly regarded him as a bit of an idiot. But now I am wiser, I think there is something to it. All it takes to have a broken church is for a few people not to exercise their gifts, even gifts they consider unimportant. It takes all of us – each and every one of us to become the living, breathing, body of Christ in the world. If you can't figure out how to exercise your gifts, then come talk to me. We'll try to figure out what your gifts are, and begin to imagine how they might advance the work of Christ.

Part of leadership is the running behind and yelling words of encouragement while trying to catch up with the followers! The body of Christ is works from the ground up. Calloused feet may not be the most gorgeous things in the world, but they get that way from carrying us along the road. Be bold. If the minister says – lovingly, of course – "Don't bother me; go away." Don't worry, when the temperature begins to drop, he'll wake up and resume his leadership role by trying to catch up. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes the entire community to become the body of Christ in the world. That's just the way it is.