

Theme: Gifted to Serve

Theme Scripture: I Peter 4:10-11 (NIRV):

God's gifts of grace come in many forms. Each of you has received a gift in order to serve others. You should use it faithfully. If you speak, you should do it like one speaking God's very words. If you serve, you should do it with the strength God provides. Then in all things God will be praised through Jesus Christ. Give him the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Theme Song: We Are an Offering (Words & Music: Dwight Lyles) (*The Celebration Hymnal, Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997*)

Theme Hymns: Make Me a Blessing (Words: Ira B. Wilson, Music: George S. Schula) (*The Worshiping Church, Hope Publishing, 2001; Worship & Service Hymnal, Hope Publishing, 1957*)

We Are Called to Be God's (Words: Thomas J. Jackson, Music: Franz Joseph Haydn) (*The Worshiping Church, Hope Publishing, 2001; Worship & Rejoice, Hope Publishing, 2001*)

Symbol: Gift box

Purpose Statement: As Cumberland Presbyterian Women, we will praise God by recognizing and using our gifts in their many forms to serve God in our words & actions.

According to Peter, our words and actions are to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. The setting for Peter's words in this passage was a persecuted community of faith who thought the end of time was very near. Because of this setting, Peter challenged the Christians to live disciplined and prayerful lives. He encouraged them to love each other deeply, to support and uphold each other during the tough times. This passage is filled with words of hope for God's people then and now. In verses 7-11, Peter challenges us to *pray* (v.7b), to *love one another* deeply (v. 8), to *be hospitable* (v. 9), and to *exercise our spiritual gifts* (vv. 10-11) in light of the end of time. To love deeply means more than just loving one's friends and family, but also to love those who are unlovable, those who are irritating and obnoxious, those who may have hurt us or offended us. Peter's words, "to love others deeply," also mean that we will show hospitality to them and share with them our gifts.

There is a strong sense of urgency in Peter's words in this passage. The early Christians were learning that in order for one of them to live in their world of persecution and opposition (with the hope of Heaven), they all had to work and function together as a whole. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. There was a poignant television commercial several years ago, advertising cotton of all things! It was a scene of young children walking hand in hand, along a busy, city sidewalk with traffic racing by. The commentator said, "If we are going to get there, we'll have to get there together." What a beautiful image of the Christian church!!! If we are going to survive in this dangerous world and arrive in Heaven one day, we will get there together, with each other through the grace of Jesus Christ.

We may not be physically persecuted for our beliefs today, but Christians surely encounter opposition to the gospel and obstacles to faith. Ours' is a culture of materialism and independence. We live in a self-sufficient environment, – "I can do it myself, thank you very much." There is little around us to encourage partnership and hospitality. There is little in our culture to call us to a life of service. But God calls us. God has gifted each believer with unique gifts and abilities in order to serve others. Our words and our actions speak loudly our beliefs. When we truly love deeply, we will speak God's words and we will serve others through God's strength. And God's Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.