

We're about half way through the Big Ten, both the football season and our series on the Big Ten Realities that shape our lives. The Big Ten standings show Iowa as the surprise team on the top and my disappointing Illini on the bottom. Our Big Ten series so far has shown us that we are Created by God, Confronted by God, Blessed by God and Rescued by God. In other words the Big Ten Realities show that God is active in our lives.

Today's reality is identified with the exclamation, "I don't feel special." Have you ever wanted to do something and not be able to do it, not gifted enough to do it. Most of us have. Maybe you tried out for a team or a roll in a High School dramatic production and didn't make it. Or you might have applied for a job and were told that you just didn't have the qualifications. Sometimes we get the impression that we're just not good enough for anything.

She went by the name Vi. She was a member of the church that I served in Prescott Valley, Arizona. Vi didn't think that she had any spiritual gifts. She told me that on several occasions. She thought that she had been passed over in that category by God. But everyone in the church knew better. Vi has this radar system about her that enabled her to see a need before anyone else. She wasn't a busy body, sticking her nose into everyone's busy. She was a woman of compassion. If someone got sick, if there was a death or any other crisis in a family, Vi would show up at their door with a smile on her face, a delicious home cooked meal in her hands and a word of encouragement. She was such a good cook, you almost wanted to get sick so that she would bring you something to eat. Vi was very special, even if she didn't think so. Vi lived up to her last name of "Golden."

Whether you realize it or not, God has given you gifts that make you very special. In his letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul addressed the issue of spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:7 (NLT) tells us, "***A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.***" Each and every member of God's family has been given at least one gift, one talent, one ability to help others. You've got it, even if you don't see it or if you're trying to hide it.

One reason we don't see those gifts is we are looking for the wrong things or looking in the wrong places. When it came time for him to anoint a new king who would follow Saul as the king of Israel, Samuel went to Jesse's home and looked at all of the brothers. He was impressed by how big, strong and handsome they were. He thought for sure one of them would be the new king. But he was wrong. God had someone else in mind and told Samuel, "***Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.***" (1 Samuel 16:7 NLT) God looks at the heart. When we realize that, we begin to see that God works in some of the most unlikely places and through some of the most unexpected people.

A problem that many people have is that they want to put God in a box. The Pharisees, a group of religious leaders in Jesus' day, wanted to keep God in a box. They wanted everything neat and orderly, with no surprises. Jesus was a challenge to their way of thinking. He didn't fit neatly inside a box and taught people to see that God could and would act in many unexpected ways. So when Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish High Council, came to see Jesus one night, he too was challenged to take another look. Jesus told Nic that he had to be born again. Jesus told Nic about the great gift that God had for all people when he said, ***“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”*** (John 3:16 NLT) The announcement of God's love for everyone didn't just spill out of the box, it destroyed the box.

God made the promise to send his Son to many people during the time of the Old Testament. God made the announcement of the gift of his Son to an unlikely group of people. The Gospel of Luke tells us that an angel told the Bethlehem shepherds, ***“I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!”*** (Luke 2:10-11 NLT) God's Son born in a barn is certainly an out of the box event.

God challenges us, like he challenged Nicodemus and the Bethlehem shepherds, to look outside the box. He challenges us to look in some unexpected places to see His gifts. The early Christians weren't exactly the crème of the crop. Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth about their past when he wrote, ***“Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:26 NLT) They were an unlikely group to turn the world upside down, but they did it because God was with them and gifted them to do His work.

God gives gifts to all of His people. God's greatest gift is love. Jesus Christ is the full expression of that love. Love shows itself in action. Love works for the good of others and to the glory of God. Whether you realize it or not, because you are loved by God, you are special. His love has the power to transform your life and enable you to do things that you may not think you can do. God did it in the life of Vi Golden. He can do it in your life, too.

(Close with video clip, “What does it take to be a superhero?” from Bluefish TV.