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Talent Isn't Everything

Preaching professor, Fred Craddock, tells the story of going to preach some years ago at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. Before going, he received a letter from a former member of his church in Atlanta who was studying opera in New York. This young man wanted to know if Craddock would stay after church on the Sunday he preached in New York, and meet with some of the young man's friends to talk about the Christian life. Craddock agreed.

So after church that Sunday, they fixed lunch in the church kitchen and then went back into the sanctuary to talk. There were about two hundred and fifty people there that day. They were all trying to break into the New York City cultural scene. Some were auditioning for the stage, some were studying music at Julliard, some were involved in opera, some were with struggling rock bands. All of them were away from home. No one would have predicted that these young artists, so focused on perfecting and marketing their talents, would have much interest in the church or the Christian life, but there they were, ready to listen and to talk.

During the discussion Professor Craddock had with these young people, one episode stood out, he said. It was when a young man explained that he was in New York City trying to launch his rock band, and wondering about the significance of his life choices and his goals. Craddock spurred him on by asking what he thought his art's purpose was. The young man replied this way: "If you have a gift and forget the giver, all you really have is talent, and talent isn't everything."

Isn't that an interesting distinction to make... between a talent and a gift? As we see so many fine young people now graduating from high school and college, and preparing to forge their way into the world as young adults, we frequently compliment them on their achievements. Achievements, we tell them, are attained because they have put their talents to good use, whether academically, athletically, or musically. Our hearty congratulations to our young people for their achievements are, of course, thoroughly justified. But we hope we do more than congratulate our young people on the appropriate use of their talents. We hope that our young people will also be encouraged to see their talents, available for all sorts of accomplishments all through their lives, for what they are in the first place: magnificent gifts – pure and simple gifts.

Gifts should never be taken for granted. They shouldn't be squandered or ignored or received without gratitude. After all, gifts are given with thoughtful intention, and even love, by a giver to a receiver. What a privilege it should be for our young graduates to recognize that not only is there a future ahead to explore and enjoy, but it has been endowed with countless possibilities, because of the gifts that have been given to help them on their way!

So may our young graduating friends recognize their best graduation gifts for what they are – the talents God has given them, sufficient for bright and exciting futures!