



On your marks

Pentecost was a time when, through the filling of the Holy Spirit, the believers found a new unity and power to work together for the growth of the kingdom of God. Each apostle discovered that they had gifts from God that complemented each others' gifts so that the work could be done. Paul uses the image of the human body to express this in 1 Corinthians 12. As he puts it, 'The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others' (v. 7, CEV).

The following parable tries to explore this in the terms of an animal fable. I have used this as part of workshops with children to open up the wonder that each of us is gifted by the Holy Spirit to work together for God's glory.

Get set

Some simple visuals for the four animals will be helpful - enlarged computer clip art, for example.

Try to work out a different voice for each of these animals as you tell the story and certainly involve the children in some appropriate sound effects (at the right moments!)

Don't rush to tell the children the 'moral' of this tale but rather let them think about it for themselves! Just what was this treasure chest?

Go!

Once upon a time, deep in a jungle far away there was a large open area of grassland. This wide clearing was surrounded in each direction by the tall and dense trees of the rain forest. Right in the centre of the open land was a tall Baobab tree with its great chunky branches stretching outwards and upwards, like an ancient king proudly showing to the other trees his special kingdom from his throne at the centre.

In fact each of the four edges to this open land was a boundary to other kingdoms, which were each the territory of four of the more colourful animals of the forest world. One side was ruled by the Giraffe; one by the Lion; one by the Toucan and the fourth by the Warthog.

In her kingdom the Giraffe walked slowly, with her neck stretched up high, chewing at the leaves she could take from the topmost branches of her part of the forest.

In his kingdom the Lion walked cautiously with a stately manner, growling from time to time as he surveyed his part of the forest.

In his kingdom the Toucan flapped his wings constantly as he hopped from branch to branch eyeing all that went on in his part of the forest.



In her kingdom the Warthog shambled along awkwardly, snorting and sniffing as she made her way clumsily through her part of the forest.

Now the amazing thing was that whenever any of the four animals reached the edge of his or her forest world then they would all come to an abrupt halt. They never went any further than their forest boundary. None of them ever went onto the open grassland that belonged to the Baobab tree.

And that was how things always were. Each minded his or her own business. They didn't acknowledge each other. They didn't talk to each other. In fact, they quite positively kept away from each other, viewing the other three animals with suspicion. After all, what need was there to step beyond their part of the forest? Didn't they have the very best bit? Wasn't their forest by far the most comfortable, interesting and suitable to their particular needs? There was no need to cross the clearing and visit the other parts, and so they never did. The Giraffe enjoyed reaching up to the leaves high in her trees; the Lion enjoyed snoozing in the long grasses beneath his trees; the Toucan enjoyed the rich greenery and excellent perches high up in his trees; the Warthog enjoyed squelching through the muddy ground at the foot of her trees. And so life went on, until...

One night there was an almighty crash that woke up the whole rainforest for miles around, and it came from the clearing, and it had something to do with the great Baobab tree.

By the pale light of dawn each of the animals crept to the edge of their part of the forest to see what it could be. There was no mistaking the source of that midnight sound. There, high up in the branches of the great tree was an object, gleaming as it caught the first rays of the sun. It was a beautiful decorated chest... a treasure chest. It had a great carved lid, a golden lock and there were thick ropes around it for added security. 'It must contain a very rich treasure,' thought each of the animals to themselves. 'It must be a gift from heaven and... it could be mine.' It would mean entering the clearing but it was too great a prize to lose because of fear.

Cautiously each animal, who had been thinking exactly the same about the treasure, stepped forward together towards the tree, each from his or her side of the forest.

The Giraffe looked up at the chest high in the Baobab's branches. 'Well, the height is no problem for me. *I* could easily reach the chest, but what about those thick ropes, the heavy carved lid and that golden lock?' thought the Giraffe. 'I'd better wait and see what the others will do.'

The Lion looked up at the chest high in the Baobab's branches.

'Well, those thick ropes will be no problem. *I* could easily shake them loose, but what about that golden lock and the heavy carved lid? And how can I get it down to the ground?' thought the Lion. 'I'd better wait and see what the others will do.'

The Toucan looked up at the chest high in the Baobab's branches. 'Well, that golden lock won't be a problem. I could easily pick it open. But how will I get it down? And what about those thick ropes and that heavy carved lid?' thought the Toucan. 'I'd better wait and see what the others will do.'



The Warthog looked up at the chest high up in the Baobab's branches. 'Well, that heavy carved lid won't be a problem. I could easily prize that open with my tusks. But how will I get it down? And what about those thick ropes and the golden lock?' thought the Warthog. 'I'd better wait and see what the others will do.'

And so they waited... and they waited... and they waited. But nobody moved. Then THE IDEA must have come to each of them at the same time. They realized what they would have to do if they wanted to discover the treasure. They exchanged glances, knowing looks and even a smile or two and then each animal moved up to the tree, closer to the treasure *and* closer to each other than they had ever been before.

The Giraffe made the first move and, reaching up with her long neck, prodded the chest with the little horns on her head and slowly but surely dislodged the chest from the branches so that it came crashing down to the ground.

The Lion moved in next and grabbed the thick ropes around the chest in his sharp fierce teeth and he shook and shook until slowly but surely the ropes loosened and he could pull them away from the treasure chest.

The Toucan moved in next and with his long sharp beak he began to pick at the golden lock, twisting and turning until slowly but surely the lock clicked open and the clasp sprang up.

Finally, it was the turn of the Warthog. She moved in and carefully inserted her great big tusks under the lid and, using all her strength, began slowly but surely to prize open the heavy wooden lid to reveal the treasure.

But just as the lid fell back, there was a great crash just like the one they had heard in the night, but this time there came also a blinding flash of light.

When the animals recovered from the glare, they looked for the treasure but to their amazement it was gone. The chest had disappeared. There was no carved wooden lid, no golden lock, no thick ropes. The treasure chest had completely disappeared.

The four animals looked around in surprise and then looked at each other. It was then that they must have all thought the same thing at the same time because slowly but surely that all began to smile.

They realized that they had discovered the treasure after all. They had discovered it together and what was more they still had that treasure. The greatest treasure they could ever have found.

Now, what do you think that treasure is?