

Varieties of Gifts

January 16, 2022

John 2: 1-11

¹ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

1st Corinthians 12: 1-11

¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;

⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.



As we begin this morning, looking at our giftedness, let us first remember why God's blesses us with various gifts. Last Sunday we spent time talking about baptism – ours and Jesus'. And last Sunday, there was a message, a theme, a truth revealed in the words God speaks over us at baptism. Does anyone remember what those words were?

Yes, they were something along the lines of: "You are loved. You are mine." I believe this is why God blesses us with the gifts and talents that we all receive. As we look at our giftedness this morning, we will see God's love for us as shown in the work that we do and in the gifts that we use. Yet God's love is not just revealed in the doing itself. We also see God's love in the ways that using our gifts or offering service or participating in different activities builds relationships. In turn, those relationships create and build community. As we prepare to jump into our passage and message for today, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Turn with me to John 2 as we begin. This is the story of Jesus' first miracle – turning water to wine. This miracle is a lesson in *extravagant generosity*. It was not just wine, it was good wine. Once the Word became flesh, the rest of the

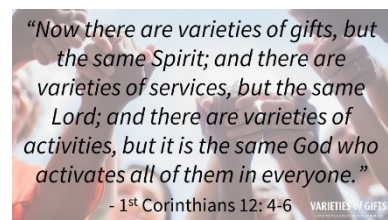


gospels show us what grace tastes like, looks like, smells like, sounds like, feels like. In the turning of water to wine, grace shows itself in the abundance, in the extravagant celebration, in the delight of being in God's presence. Just as this gift of Jesus called those at the wedding feast into a place of generosity, God calls us over and over to the feast, to the place of abundance that we find in God's love. This call is transformative. It signals that God remembers each of us and takes delight in providing our "daily bread" – all that we need. As we turn to our passage from 1st Corinthians 12, keep this idea of extravagance in mind as we look at the varieties of gifts that we have as a community of faith.

At the time that Paul went on missionary trips and then wrote his letters to the church in Corinth, this large metropolitan city was like the old Las Vegas or maybe what Beulah used to be like during the old days of the Rally. In its day it was called "Sin City." For those to whom Paul ministered and then later wrote, Corinth was a hard place to be a Christian. It was a dog-eat-dog place where immoral behavior and idol worship were the norm. Pleasure and gratification were high on people's lists. The focus was on self and on ways to elevate self and one's position, title, status, and power. It was a hard place and time to be a Christian.

The pagan and secular culture around them had seeped into the church and its members. This led to the core issues for the church in Corinth: disunity and discord. These are still core issues for many churches. It could certainly be said of our denomination, of our global United Methodist Church. Instead of trying to work around these issues, Paul chose to tackle them head-on. Today's passage centers around the variety of gifts given to the believers by the Holy Spirit and the ways that the variety of gifts can be used to build unity in the church.

In verses 4-6 Paul writes, *"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."* Paul is drilling down on the idea that, yes, there are many kinds of gifts, service, and activities. Yes, there is a wide variety of ways to be involved as we live out our faith. But it is the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God that activates our gifts, our serving, our activities.



There is a variety of gifts, but the same giver of gifts, given for the same purpose: to build the body of Christ. This idea, of course, connects back into last Sunday's theme of love. We are beloved by God. Filled with God's love, we are then called to be the love of God made real in the world. This variety of gifts – all given by the same Spirit – should work within us to unite us, to help us focus on the common goal of building the kingdom of God. Paul would argue that it is love that motivates believers to use their giftedness to serve others and to live in relationship with others. The Spirit that gives us gifts also works within us to guide us to use those gifts in accordance with God's will and purposes.

That is what Paul is focusing on in verse 7, where he writes, *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* The Spirit, the divine presence of God, gives us gifts that are present in the Spirit, that are inherent to



God. The manifestation of these gifts is the partial list that Paul gives in verses 8-10. Before we turn to those, let’s take a minute to consider the end-product of these gifts. This phrase, “the common good”, is one that Paul hones in on a lot in his writings to the early churches. The body of Christ is built up when we are growing in our faith in Jesus and when we are growing in our relationships with one another. Paul would argue that we are all gifted in our various ways so that we can be united by the Spirit as we come together to work for the transformation of ourselves, of our community of faith, and of the world around us.

This ideal, this working together for the common good, was not what was happening at the church in Corinth. These were some in the church who felt superior to others because of the gifts that the Spirit had given them. These “super Christians”, as they were known, were holding themselves above others who they saw as less gifted. This attitude worked against the common good, creating division and discord. Even though those with perceived “lesser” gifts were contributing and were serving, they were made to feel inferior. Those who thought they had been given “better” gifts were trying to throw their weight around. They discounted all who had what they thought were lesser gifts – never mind the way they treated those who did not think they were gifted at all.



Paul countered this divisive attitude by reminding the church in Corinth that all gifts are given by and motivated by the same Spirit. Paul would argue that the grandest, most amazing gifts and the simplest, most modest acts are all

equally important in the building up of the kingdom of God and that are all empowered by the Spirit. In verse 11 Paul puts it this way: *“All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”* The Spirit gives. Who are we to question or think that one gifts is better than another?

I think that is what Paul is talking about at the beginning of our passage. He begins by telling these new believers that he *“does not want them to be uninformed.”* Paul, speaking mostly to those who felt superior, reminds them that one they were all *“pagans”* and that all of them used to be *“enticed and led astray by idols that could not speak.”* Those in the church – both those who felt superior and those who felt inferior – they did not become the believers that they are on their own. Paul wants them to remember that each step on their journey of faith has been led, guided, supported, empowered, made possible by the Holy Spirit. It is not their own strengths or abilities or even efforts that has led them to the place of faith that they now reside. Left on their own, they would still be stuck in their sin, just as we would.

We too can be tempted to think ourselves better than others – even better than our fellow Christians. It is easy to look at someone else and to think how much better we are than they are. It is easy to judge someone else’ circumstances or situation and feel

superior – even though we have no idea how or why they got to that place. We can also think wonderful things about how far we have come on our own journey of faith, looking back smugly upon who we used to be. We can say with pride that we read our Bibles and pray for long periods of time every day or that we are led by the Spirit to serve others in this way or that way. By our boasting we can make others feel inferior or less than. Too easily we forget how lost we would be without the Spirit's presence in our lives, walking with and guiding us. Too easily we can forget where we came from.

Just as Paul does not leave the Corinthians there, understanding how lost they would be without the Spirit, let us not stop there either. Equating the variety of gifts with an equal representation of Christ's love within each believer, Paul warns against speaking down to or talking down about others in the body of Christ. If speaking by the Spirit, no one would in any way curse another brother or sister in Christ. By the same token, no one can truly say "*Jesus is Lord*" except by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works to build up the body, to bring unity, to help disciples strive for the common good, to let Christ and Christ's example lead at all times and in all ways. But this is not how the church in Corinth is behaving.

Paul tells them bluntly that if they are causing division and discord in the community of faith, then they are, in essence, cursing Christ and are not speaking by the Spirit. As I pondered these words of warning, I can't help but think that this word maybe applies to the church today.

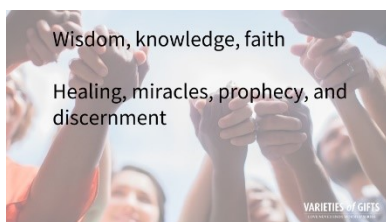
As I considered these words of Paul, I came to see that they certainly apply to my life at times. I can fall short of this goal of always building up. I have at times cut others down, lessened them, diminished them – maybe not always in spoken words but definitely in the dark thoughts of my heart. Here too the Spirit goes to work, refining me as conviction and holy guidance lead me to a better walk. In turn, my relationships with others then finds itself on more solid footing.

As we close, let us turn to these gifts that Paul lists in verses 8-10. Again, as I said

earlier and point out in one of the GPS questions, this list is not all-inclusive. Nor is it meant to be. Paul is simply listing some of the gifts of the Spirit. The first three Paul lists in this passage are wisdom, knowledge, and faith. These gifts are



widely given – all of us here today would have some degree of these gifts, especially the third one, faith. Wisdom is the gift of understanding scripture. Knowledge is knowing what is found in the scriptures. This may be the gift of memorizing passages or of being able to recall or paraphrase different stories or teachings from the Bible. Faith is an abiding trust in the Lord. Again, all of these are gifts that we have been blessed with to some degree.



Next Paul lists the gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, and discernment. Healing comes in many forms. Some heal hearts by words of kindness and empathy. Some heal relationships through words of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Some offer prophecy – sometimes speaking truth in the tradition of the prophets of old, sometimes speaking words of new insight or direction. Others have the gift of discernment. For some, this is the ability to read the landscape, to evaluate the conditions and circumstances, to perceive a way forward or through a situation. For others, the gift of discernment is an almost divine sense of right and wrong, of justice and equality.

Before we get to the last two gifts, I want to share an insight that Pastor Doug Diehl offered at our lectionary study group that meets on Tuesdays in Rapid City. We were discussing the passages for this week and we turned our attention to the variety of gifts given by the Spirit. Doug shared that he always saw the gifts – whether healing or discernment or wisdom or whatever – not as things God gave us to bless us, but as gifts that we have to bless others. If one has the gift of prayer, for example, and one prays diligently for another’s healing and that person is healed, then the gift of prayer blesses the person that has been made well. As I reflected on this insight, I appreciated the truth of Doug’s words. All of the gifts, all of our gifts, are not for our benefit but are for the benefit of others. This is definitely one way that God uses our varieties of gifts to bring unity and to build up the body of Christ.

Lastly Paul addresses the gift of tongues – of speaking in tongues and of interpreting what is spoken in tongues. Maybe he lists this one last simply because it is the one that seems to be driving the division and discord in the church in Corinth.



One example of this gift is what happened that first Pentecost, when those gathered were indwelt by the Holy Spirit and spoke the gospel in many different languages. Usually, or at least traditionally, the gift of speaking in tongues is not speaking in an earthly language, so to speak. Rather, it is speaking in a divine language that must be interpreted by someone who has the gift of interpreting of tongues. These more “flamboyant” gifts were being used to create division and discord. Those with these gifts held it over their fellow believers in the early church.



In discussing these various gifts, Paul’s aim, however, was not to elevate one gift or some gifts over others, one act of service over others, or one activity over other activities.

Instead, Paul’s goal was to point out that in our diversity, we can still find unity. In our varieties of gifts, we find blessings amongst one another and we find places and opportunities to work together, to bless one another. When we see one another – whatever our gifts, whatever our ways of serving, whatever our activities that express our faith – as fellow brothers and sisters of the same body, as equally beloved of God, as individuals with blessings to offer for the common good, then we find strength and love and faith working as one community of faith. May we see each other as all of these things, as beloved gifts of God. Doing so, we will together be a part of building the kingdom of God in this time and place. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As you think about your journey of faith, when have the things of this world drawn you away or sought to replace your faith? How did the Spirit work in and through you to resist or defeat that temptation?
- 2) *Pray*. Do you ever feel “superior” because of your gifts or talents or because of the way that God used them through you? Pray for the Spirit to help remove these feelings that divide instead of unite.
- 3) *Study*. Read Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:7-11, and 1st Peter 4:10-11. How do these passages (and today’s from 1st Corinthians 12) add to your understanding of your giftedness and how it can be used to build unity in the church?