

**August 7, 2022**

**1 Corinthians 12**

**Many Gifts, One Spirit**

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Many of you know my experiences in churches as a teen were not awesome. It seemed to me that the grown-ups (and even some of the teens) I met in the churches I attended with my friends were not at all like the Jesus they claimed to follow. I rejected all of it for a while...Church, God, Jesus, all of it. Later, as an adult, I changed my mind about God and was finally introduced to a Jesus I could get behind, one that wasn't white or American, a Jesus that was mad about the same things I was mad about. But the Church...I was still highly suspicious of the Church and in some ways, I am still suspicious of organized religion. Fortunately, what we have going on here isn't organized...

The problem I had when I changed my mind about God was that, as a person in my mid-20s, who didn't have much experience with spirituality, I didn't know how to connect with God without being part of a church. How would I learn about the Bible and this new Jesus I had found if I didn't go to church?

So, I went to church. When I did, I met people who had been part of that church or at least a church, their whole lives or at least long enough to feel at home there. They had found their place. They were Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, faucet fixers and light bulb changers, prayer note writers, choir singers, handbell ringers, potluck organizers, nursery workers, gifted administrators, and stand-in grandparents for the little ones, including my own, who were running amuck. They had their own offering envelopes that they dutifully put in the offering plate every week. Their names were inside the newly purchased hymnals and their children and grandchildren all knew the secret hiding places in the cool, old church building.

As I spent time at the church, as I got to know the people who showed up there every week, I longed, not for what they believed but for what they had. They had a sense of belonging. They had found their place. When I joined the church, I went to the front of the church and the minister asked me some questions about what I believed, and I said yes to them, not knowing what I believed, but I knew I wanted to belong. I wanted to find my place. After worship, the minister asked me how I wanted to be involved in the church. We talked about what was

important to me and what I enjoyed doing. In that season of life, it was youth and children's ministry. I didn't know much about the Bible, but I knew kids. And so I found my place, my way of being part of the church.

Today's text from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, which he started, was written about 54 CE. This part of the letter is primarily about the division that was occurring in the community over the ways in which the people in that community contributed to the church. Corinth was a large, prosperous urban center with an ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse population. The congregation was predominantly gentile and likely mirrored the diversity of the city. It is likely the church consisted of small groups of believers organized into several house churches. At regular intervals, all the groups would come together for a common meal and worship. It is at one of these gatherings that this letter from Paul was probably read. This is 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11:

**12** Now concerning spiritual gifts, siblings, I do not want you to be ignorant. <sup>2</sup>You know that when you were gentiles you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. <sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another the working of powerful deeds, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup>All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

I don't know about you, but when I hear the word gift, I think...there are 140 days until Christmas. Or maybe you think about an upcoming birthday or, today, about a gift you might purchase for your child to take to their new teacher. I recommend gift cards for that. Not Starbucks, though, since they are currently closed for a month. That's not bothering me at all. I'm surprised I mentioned it. Unlike gift cards and the like, which are meant for individual enjoyment, Paul's explanation of spiritual gifts imagines a divine giver who gives gifts based on what

will most contribute to the common good of a whole community. Spiritual gifts are gifted not only to the person with the gift, but to everyone.

This chapter begins with a phrase Paul used several times in the letter: “Now concerning...” It indicates a new topic, but also seems to signal that he is responding to questions that were raised by the Corinthians themselves. In this context, it is as if we are hearing only one side of a telephone conversation. We have no idea exactly what was asked, but in this letter, Paul gives us the answer.

The text indicates there was disagreement on the importance of some ways of contributing to the church over other ways. They couldn’t work it out themselves, so they tattled to Paul who, you should know, placed a high value on unity and mending division. This is what he wrote at the beginning of the letter, “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” I file this under the category, “Easier said than done.” It sounds really good on paper, or parchment, but it is hard to practice. We like the idea of diversity, but it is work to be in community with all different kinds of people. And human beings have a tendency to try to make everything a hierarchy; “This gift is better than that gift,” instead of, “It’s all good.”

Paul encourages the people to recognize and appreciate all spiritual gifts and cooperate with one another. We have each been given gifts to use them, not to elevate ourselves and our own interests, but for the benefit of the whole community and I would extend that and say, for the benefit of all of creation. The truth is, spiritual gifts are not something that can be quantified anyway. Who is more important, the people who care for our children in the nursery or the person who makes sure the air conditioning in the sanctuary is working properly? We need them both; they both use their gifts for all of us.

More than thinking and declaring our gifts are better than other people’s gifts, though, we too often think and declare the opposite, that other people are more gifted, better qualified, or prepared, have more time, resources, or energy. Sometimes we use humility as an excuse not to participate, “Oh, surely there is someone who knows how to do whatever it is better than I do.” Sometimes that is true, but sometimes it isn’t.

Sometimes what we need is the courage to use our gifts, which I think Paul was trying to give some of the folks in the Corinthian church when he wrote that nobody says, “Jesus is Lord,” without the help of the Holy Spirit. Though deceptively simple on its surface, this claim in the first century Mediterranean world made a radical political statement. To claim, “Jesus is Lord” was also to claim that Caesar and other human leaders were not lord. Such statements would have surely been viewed with skepticism and apprehension, and people who made them publicly may have faced any number of potentially negative consequences. Paul point was that only the Holy Spirit could give those new followers of Jesus the courage to make such an inflammatory, controversial proclamation considering the potentially dangerous results.

Certainly, there is no threat to those who claim, “Jesus is Lord” in the United States of America in 2022. As someone who is uncomfortable with that language in today’s context, I would venture to say that in northeast Oklahoma and in places like it in this nation, it feels more dangerous to reject that statement than to proclaim it. But that is a sermon for another day. The point is, no matter who you are or what you believe, using the gifts you have been given for the common good often takes courage. It is easier and safer not to do anything. But friends, there are people who are depending on us, not for thoughts and prayers, but to actually do something.

Specifically, what this church is doing, our shared ministry, needs your gifts, whatever they are. There is a place in this community for you. You belong here.

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And there are ways for you to contribute to the work of **welcoming** our neighbors, while **growing** into who you were created to be and helping other people grow into who they were created to be and for you to help as we work to bring about **justice by serving** the ones who are vulnerable. And now is the perfect time to share your gifts as there is a lot happening.

Tomorrow, we kick off The Village Fosters, a once a week, open and affirming gathering for foster families (and people considering being foster parents) that will include a meal for everyone, a presentation by an expert on a topic relevant to the families, and supervised activities for the kiddos while the grown-ups listen to the presentation. And, because everyone likes to win things, each week there

will be a drawing for a cool prize. Our partners for this new ministry (because we are always better together) are The Village Fosters-Tulsa, Westside Community Center, Tri County Tech Child Development Center, Ray of Hope Advocacy Center, Oklahomans for Equality-Bartlesville, and Washington County DHS.

What gifts can you offer this ministry? Can you cook? Can you bake cookies or buy ice cream? Set up meals or clean up afterward? Can you wash dishes? Are you a good welcome-er? Can you ask businesses for prize donations? Can you lead a craft for the older kiddos or supervise basketball outside? Can you hang out on Monday evenings and do whatever needs to be done? Callie would love to talk to you about how your gifts can benefit this new thing that God is doing. Tomorrow night, the families will be in this building for the first time, for an Art Party. Help us welcome them!

But wait...there is more. Choir practice starts next Sunday afternoon after our Second Sunday Summer Salad Sampler featuring Rev. Bobby Hawley's presentation on how we can work together to secure the future of the church. If you have the gift of loving music, you should stay for choir practice. Or if you have the gift of hospitality, Casey Williams our Chair of Fellowship would love to help you find your place organizing our fun and food for all ages and stages, like the Second Sunday Summer Salad Sampler... or maybe if you have the gift of naming things?

In the next few weeks, Connections, DCC's community youth group in partnership with OKEQ-Bartlesville, will resume. Worship and Wonder, a child-friendly worship experience for children in early elementary grades, will start its new year. If your gift is storytelling, our littles would love to learn from you in this trauma-informed setting. You may have heard we have yoga on Wednesdays at 12:15 pm. Is there something you can lead as a gift not only to the DCC community, but to the larger community? Do you have the gift of green-thumbbedness? We have some landscaping that has your name on it.

You get the idea...there is something for all of us to do. Last week when we experimented with Story Church I said, "All stories are God's stories." Well, "All gifts are God's gifts," too. The stuff you know how to do is a gift that is supposed to be used to create a world that reflects the good stuff...inclusion, compassion, and love. That's why we are here, right? To create that kind of a world? Look

around...these are the people who want the same kind of world you do. Now, let's work together and make it happen. Amen.