

January 15, 2023

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

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Scripture

12 Now concerning spiritual gifts, ^[a] brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be ignorant. ²You know that when you were gentiles you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore 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.

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, ⁵and 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 powerful deeds, 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.

Sermon

One of my most memorable Christmases was when I was in the 3rd grade. You might think that we are about to walk through a beautiful story where I asked for something from Santa or otherwise and received a gift so fantastic that it stands out in my memory as the most magical Christmas ever. Unfortunately, that isn't where this story takes us. That Christmas my whole family gathered at our house, which was memorable, all on its own, as we normally traveled to Duncan to gather with my Dad's side of the family. However, that year they all came to us in Tulsa. When it came time to open presents I was so excited because one of my aunts was known for really great gift giving. Typically, your gift was never something you asked for and yet, was always something you ended up loving. When her present was passed to me I could hardly contain my joy, upon opening the present I found myself staring down at new purple shoe laces. Shoe laces. Now I will give her a little credit. Purple was my favorite color and they were the kind that were coiled— like an old telephone cord. However, all my shoes already had laces in them and shoe laces were not the things of children's Christmas

dreams. I was disappointed and I am sure at 8 years old I didn't hide my disappointment well. As I recall, I said thank you but got a "lesson" later about how we ought to receive gifts with a grateful and thankful spirit. I was reminded of that Christmas this year because our neighbor gifted Hadley and Collins with some stuffed animals that warm up in the microwave, or can be chilled in the freezer. Upon opening them, Hadley exclaimed, "But we already have two of these!" and then she dropped the bag on the floor and ran off to play. I thanked Jesus that the gifts had been dropped off and not opened in front of our amazing and sweet neighbor who thinks of my children as her only grandchildren. Hadley too received a delightful little talk about how gifts are important because someone thought to give them and not based on how much we like the gift. This week in the US we remember Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his dream of creating a Beloved Community. I've been reading quite a bit about the early Civil Rights Movement and how similar things then are to today. I don't especially like what I have read. It is unsettling how a lot of what we hear today sounds like the rhetoric of those who justified the systems of racism in days gone by. In doing this reading though, I came across a new to me quote from Dr. King. The quote reads,

"We have inherited a large house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together- black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu – a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live together with each other in peace."

I wonder if we might hear this quote differently in light of today's text from Paul about gifts. Perhaps if we replaced the word inherited with gifted, we have been *gifted* a world house, that we must live in and care for together.

But here's the question. Do we see it as a gift? Do we receive our diversity, multiculturalism, varying ideas and ideologies as a gift? Do we receive the charge to learn about one another and make a way towards peace together? Or do we see some purple shoe laces?

Perhaps on our best days we receive the blessing of being part of this world house, with joy and dedication to do the work. However, I am sure there are some days we would like to exclaim that we already have enough diversity, in fact our diversity is all we have thanks. I'd bet that some days we would be willing to exchange our house where we "work to live together in peace" for a house of comfort. Yes, on our very worst days this world house isn't something we receive

with thanksgiving but is instead something we feel we must live with or suffer through.

This is nothing new friends. The church in Corinth received Paul's words much in the same way we hear Dr. King's even still today. Paul writes to a community where divisions ran deep. A community too, that had been gifted. With their own home to build together, but with spiritual gifts as well. Paul reminds them that "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. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

To each is given a gift for the common good. A gift for the world house perhaps. As people of faith, we too have been gifted with gifts of the Spirit. Some of us can sing, and some of us are expert grant writers, and some of us are good at gathering information or organizing people and things. And these gifts too – we aren't always the best at receiving. I tried everything I could to do ANYTHING but become a minister. It was a gift, a call, I didn't want – at least not at first. That's the thing about spiritual gifts sometimes. Even when we want to see them as gifts – we struggle. That's the crux of this scripture – we are called to live into how we receive the gifts of God. And that sometimes is tricky. As hard as we try we find that

We still seek sameness, even as we're reminded to treasure 'otherness'.

We still value gifts that resemble our own, while we discount gifts in others that we don't quite understand.

We still rest in our privilege, ease, and comfort, and struggle to hear voices who tell us their health, their flourishing, their lives, matter too.

It is in our nature to be this way. And yet, these words of King and Paul remind us that we are called to more. For while, perhaps it is in our nature to be this way, it is the nature of God to shake us out of our comfort and clear the dust out of our preconceptions of others and ourselves. It is God's nature to empower us to live toward our better natures.

And thank God for that gift.

We are gifted a great world house and we are entrusted to care for one another and work for peace. Theologian Karoline Lewis notes, that Paul's opening sentence to this chapter, could be paraphrased in this way, "Therefore, since you have received many gifts, what will you do with them?" How will you use them to work together for unity Paul asks. Of course they scoff at him. Unity...right. And at

a time when our world seems so divided we scoff too – but all the same the question remains – what will you do with the gifts you’ve been given? How will you work for peace? How will you learn from and care for your neighbors?

The question isn’t whether you have gifts. *You do*. I look around this room and there are gifts a plenty.

I’m not talking about some Spidey-sense, Super Hero thing, where our gifts turn into super powers like x-ray vision or being able to eat carbs and be skinny.

Although that would be fun. But actual gifts. Eyes for seeing the world in a way only each of us can. The question is—*do we allow God to use us for the common good?* Paul writes:

“...it is the same God who activates gifts in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

Our gifts are activated by God for the common good. When we come together, who we are individually is amplified into something greater together. We can’t and aren’t meant to live as if we aren’t connected, one to the other. Our giftedness can’t be used for the common good if we pretend that our gifting is only meant to serve us, or if we have decided that our giftedness doesn’t matter or isn’t useful.

I had to learn how to receive purple shoe laces. More importantly I needed an attitude adjustment, or a reframing about what the gift of those shoe laces meant. And just like that, it matters how we receive the gifts God has given us. We must receive our gifts, own them, and use them out of love for one another. Love, as Dr. King notes on your bulletin, is the only way we are connected to one another. Love is the only way we learn to live with one another in peace. And we share our love by using what we have and who we for the common good.

Recently on facebook Maria Gus, asked her friends to name individuals that they think make a difference in the community of Bartlesville. If you haven’t seen her post she ended up with a very, very, long list of names. The people that were named came from all sorts of backgrounds, and beliefs. The list included indigenous, black, white, Asian, Latinos, straight, LGBTQ, Conservative, liberal, moderate, progressive, different faith traditions, no faith traditions, atheists, old, young, folks native to Oklahoma and people who had transplanted to Oklahoma. A list of people I would argue, using their gifts, for the greater good. Maria should of preached today because in her post she said, “Diversity makes our community better. Differences make our community stronger. There is room for everyone.

We need those that see the world differently than us. It takes all of us to support each other and make our home better.” She was obviously talking about Bartlesville, but it rings true too for King’s quote about the “world house” we have inherited. Should we aspire to live in Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of peace and unity, It is going to take all of us – using our gifts – to build a better house. God has given diverse gifts for a diverse community and this diversity is a source of strength to be honored and celebrated. Perhaps today we might receive our gifts with thanksgiving, and get to work. To right injustice, to seek peace, and to participate in community.

Amen.