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January 16, 2022

Pastor Matthias Krier

Human Relations Day (Offering)

Observing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Scripture Lesson: I Corinthians 12:1-11 NRSV Carol Brown

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

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God**

Christmas is indeed a wonderful time of the year! One time a dear friend and parishioner in one of my previous churches gave me a Christmas gift of some delicious dark chocolates and noticed while we were visiting that I ate only one. “Don’t you like them,” she asked. And I said, “Look Carol, I gained a few pounds over Christmas and frankly, my pants are getting too tight and I don’t want to go out and have to buy new pants.” Now Carol also knew that I was frugal and responded with this remark: “Oh, I get it. When your pants get too tight, you are too tight to buy new pants!”

Well there are gifts and then there are gifts. Today, following our shared Christmas season, we are looking to spiritual gifts instead of Christmas gifts.

How many here know what your spiritual gifts are?

A few moments ago, we heard from I Corinthians, a listing of some of the spiritual gifts. There are more listed elsewhere in the Bible and you can review them with the insert you received this week. I have asked this question before and I ask it again: How many of you have ever taken a spiritual gifts inventory or completed a study of the spiritual gifts? One cannot really do justice to this passage in a sermon, but maybe we can get Dave Duffy to teach a class since he has done that in his previous churches on spiritual gifts. But for now, let us take this one section at a time:

12 Now concerning spiritual gifts,^{} brothers and sisters,^{*} I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, 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.*

First of all, as we hear, Paul does not want his audience to be uninformed. There was controversy over the spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church. The contrast with the pagan idols who could not speak and the Spirit of God that could proclaim Jesus as Lord was a profound insight and admonition at the time. It may not seem like such a big deal to us, but Paul is offering his guidance on the matter. Let us continue with this passage in verse 4:

4 Now 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.

Now it is important to understand that there were those in the Corinthian church who thought that the gift of tongues was a higher gift than the others. We will talk more about this next week in Part II of this series, but for now, know that Paul was not happy with those who believed that they were better because they could speak in tongues. Paul is saying no, there are a variety of gifts, but none is better than the other, just different for the common good. We continue with verses 8-10:

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.

How many of you know someone with the gift of tongues or interpretation of tongues? Now the Bible is clear on how to use these gifts but there are Christians who believe that these gifts no longer exist. Now as you have heard me say before:



When you take the time to do a study on the spiritual gifts, you will learn how the gift of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues are to be used appropriately. For example, unless there is someone to interpret the gift of tongues, then it should not be used publicly, only privately. The spiritual gifts are to be used for the edification of the body of Christ, not to divide it. The gift of tongues may seem strange to you and that is okay, but we do not need to fear what we do not understand.

Moving on, it would seem to me that it is not only our responsibility to know what our gifts are, but to actually put them to use. While I think it is important to discover your spiritual gifts through an online survey or a spiritual gifts study, you can get a hint of what your gifts are. How?



In the past how many times has the Nominations Team asked you to do something and you knew it wasn't a fit but you said yes anyway? When you know what your spiritual gifts are you can easily say, "No, working in this

area is not one of my spiritual gifts.” Besides, why would you say yes to something that is not a good fit for you?

I believe that when you “do what you love and love what you do” you no doubt are exercising your spiritual gifts.” When I was in college a spiritual friend at the time who knew me pretty well said, “You have the gift of exhortation.” I was 19 years of age and the Bible was new to me and the gift of exhortation did not sound like a gift to me. When he saw the look on my face, he said something to the effect, “No worries, the gift of exhortation means you simply enjoy encouraging people to grow in their walk with God.” If you truly enjoy encouraging others in their walk with God, then you too may have the gift of exhortation. Now, it needs to be said that we may all encourage one another at times, but just as we all may feel hospitable at times, does not mean we all have the gift of hospitality. In both of these cases of the gifts of exhortation and hospitality, truly having these gifts goes beyond the occasional expression of these gifts and is considered “extraordinary” in practice. We know of folks who practice these gifts in an extraordinary way and whether it is the gift of exhortation or the gift of hospitality, it flows out of them effortlessly as well as frequently!

The last verse in this passage says:

¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Each of us are given spiritual gifts in building the body of Christ. Are we doing that? If not, what is keeping us from exercising our spiritual gifts? What are we afraid of? And do not lift up those you admire greatly and say you could never measure up to what they say and do.

There is a teaching from the Talmud which is a major source of teaching in Judaism. Listen to the wisdom in this teaching as we contemplate exercising our spiritual gifts:

Akiba

When Akiba was on his deathbed, he bemoaned his rabbi that he felt he was a failure. His rabbi moved closer and asked why, and Akiba confessed that he had not lived a life like Moses. The poor man began to cry, admitting that he feared God's judgment. At this, the rabbi leaned into his ear and whispered gently, "God will not judge Akiba for not being Moses. God will judge Akiba for not being Akiba."

As the body of Christ, we are nourished and fed through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We are not called to try and be like someone else. We are called to be who we are called to be exercising our spiritual gifts in the building of the body of Christ. May we be fed and nourished at this table where we are always welcome.

Prayer

Let us Pray: As we prepare the Sacrament of Holy Communion, may we open our hearts and minds in not only exercising our spiritual gifts, but open to the Holy Spirit guiding us and transforming us and empowering us in every way. Everyone is not only welcome at this table, everyone is invited as a follower of Jesus to serve the body of Christ here and beyond. Amen and so be it!