

Scriptures: John 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

God Gifts Us God's Best

The pairing of our first Scripture, from John's gospel, and the reading we'll look at momentarily from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is interesting. In the gospel account which occurs a short time – maybe a week or so, if I'm reading it correctly – after Jesus' baptism, the Lord is at a wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. We know that story, you heard that story earlier, the short of it is that Jesus turned jars of water into wine. It wasn't just any \$7.99 wine you'd find at Walmart, it was the best stuff the host of the wedding feast had tasted all night! Probably in his whole life, if we could hear his personal testimony – God gifts us with God's best, and Jesus shows us He's the Lord of all Creation in this miracle, of turning water into wine. If you have your Bible or a Bible app with you today, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. I'll be reading from the New International Version Bible, but whatever you have is great – the main thing is that it's one you'll open up and read, and let God speak to your heart and mind on a routine basis. We're going to read about varieties of gifts He continues to give today. **Read 1 Cor. 12:1-11.**

How many of you have been to Las Vegas? I've never been there, but I've heard its nickname, and I'm sure you have too, "Sin City," along with its catchphrase, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." Corinth was the "Sin City" of its day. There was so much happening in that town, that it was hard to be a follower of Jesus Christ there. It was tough to maintain purity. The town had 12 temples to different Greek gods and goddesses, and one of them, the temple of Aphrodite, employed 1,000 temple prostitutes. What a wacky, messed up religion! It was rough staying out of the eat-or-be-eaten business of the surrounding community. Corinth was a crossroads for travelers and traders from all over the world. In Paul's day, Corinth had an estimated population of 250,000 free people, plus as many as 400,000 slaves. Business was booming! One reason it was so hard to be a Christian Corinthian, was that the mindset and belief system of the surrounding society leaked into, and contaminated, the thinking and beliefs of the church. Does that sound familiar?

Paul wrote the two letters to the Corinthian Church which we find in Scripture, to address issues in the church. We aren't going to be able to get into the specifics of all the issues over the next seven weeks, but they boil down to one fundamental problem, from Paul's point of view, which is disunity. In today's passage, we see there's some disunity – discord – within the church concerning spiritual gifts. Paul says, "Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed," (1 Cor. 12:1). He's going to spell it out for them because there's obviously some confusion about it. "You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols," he tells them in verse 2. He's talking

specifically about the statues the Corinthian people were bowing to and worshiping in those 12 temples across the city.

Mute Idols

They were, quite literally, mute idols. They couldn't talk. They were made out of stone and wood. There are a lot of people yet today following mute idols! People who have to have the latest and greatest, fanciest car – now if they have On Star in them, they may not be quite as mute as the idols were in Paul's day! Or people pursuing fame and fortune above everything else – that's a mute idol. Wealth and influence, they're both here today, gone tomorrow. Physical appearance – again, here today, gone tomorrow, or perhaps the other way around! Or people putting all their hopes and dreams into their family – family's great, don't misunderstand me – but family is made up of people, and eventually people will fail you. God alone, is worthy of worship.

Notice what Paul says next, "Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit," (verse 3). In other words, the Holy Spirit equips and enables us to recognize and proclaim that Jesus is Lord. He's the Lord of us – He's the King of the Church, and you and me! There must have been some kind of a fringe group in the Corinthian Church this was specifically addressed to, because I can't imagine anyone in their right mind – or even their wrong one – saying "Jesus be cursed." But, I'm biased – we're biased – in this regard, because we do know and love Him.

Giftedness

The rest of today's text deals with our giftedness. You know, for many years I worked with students labeled "Gifted and talented." All that means is that they're smart. They're intelligent. Some of them have a high IQ. Others are adept at various skills – skilled with music, creating art, dancing, those kinds of things. It was a fun gig. I still sit on a judging panel through the county office with my cousin Jane, to evaluate and critique students exploring giftedness in the performing arts. I enjoy watching junior high, and high school aged kids do that sort of stuff. I've never been much into sports, but I could watch school plays until the cows come home. Shelby County has a lot of raw talent, just waiting to be discovered in our districts! That's true of the Church in general, too. And it's especially true of New Hope United Methodist Church! We've got a lot of raw talent, waiting to be discovered.

Paul tells us, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work," (1 Cor. 12:4-6). In other words, you have gifts. You are gifted! You've been gifted, by the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and He's going to use the gift He's given to you to work through you and draw others to Him. The next thing Paul tells us is the reason – the

why, and this is the big take away for today – “To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good,” (verse 7).

In other words, no one’s a proverbial island. You have gifts. You have skills. Everyone does – that’s something a lot of folks don’t realize. They view themselves as “lesser” because for some reason in this country in particular, and in Western society in general, we tend to operate from the standpoint of scarcity. America is the wealthiest country on the planet. Yet we operate from a mode of deficit and liability, rather than seeing we have a multitude of assets. People have been harping about our southern border for years. The prime motivation for that is to limit the coming in of people from – let’s be honest here – impoverished countries mostly in Central and South America, like Haiti, yet we think nothing of having people fly in on jets from France, Germany, or Ireland, who get visas to work here for years on end. Historically speaking, my ancestors who came over from Germany, England, and Ireland didn’t go through any sort of background check or screening process to be able to live here. They paid whatever it cost to ride over on a wooden sailboat, and accepted the kindness of Native Americans to help them be successful in this country. And I’m willing to bet that most of your ancestors came over the same way, too.

The same could be said of the Church, generally speaking. There are churches so inwardly focused – so focused on the scarcity mindset, which says, “We don’t have enough” – that if there weren’t a couple cars in the parking lot on a Sunday morning, we’d assume they were permanently closed. There is enough, friends, because we’ve all been given gifts. He’s given us skills.

Varieties of Gifts

Paul tells us some of the gifts – and it’s not an all inclusive list, there are others to be sure – he says, “To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues,” (verses 8-10). Isn’t it amazing, that God has furnished the body of Christ with everything it needs to be successful and active in the world today? He gives us the assets, we just need eyes to see them. We also need minds and hearts open enough to receive them.

One way we do that is to really begin taking stock of the ways in which we have been gifted, and the ways in which we have been called to serve the living God. How do you know you’re gifted? Well, Paul tells us. He says, “All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines,” in verse 11. Don’t sit there and think, “Oh, I don’t have any gifts.” You’ve got gifts and skills, and friends, He’s called you to a life of service to Him! He anticipates and

expects that we'll discover our gifts, use those same gifts, and activate them so they aren't neglected.

What happens when you have a gift, or a skill, and you don't use it? You get rusty, right? Or you lose it. If you've been laying around, not doing much of anything, let's say you were sick – you start getting atrophied muscles. You feel wimpy. And then when you get to feeling better and start doing stuff again, you get winded, and have to catch your breath. There are times when we have to relearn how to do something because we haven't done the thing in so long that we've forgotten how to do it. It's like taking three years worth of high school Spanish, and then not using it for years and years. So there I was, nearly 20 years out of high school, and trying to provide academic support to high school Spanish students on IEPs. It did not go very well at first, and Mr. Tobie, the Spanish teacher, had to "tutor the tutor!"

Everyone Has Gifts

See friends, the point is, it's not just about me or about you. Everyone in the body has received gifts. And the gifts don't come from me – and they don't come from you – they come from God. They are gifts that can and should be used in community, because there is no one in the body who has not been gifted to serve the mission of God in the world. Let me say it another way – anyone in the body has been gifted to serve the mission of God in the world. We need eyes and hearts to claim our gifts, and to see the gifts of others. We also need to see how those gifts work in harmony, collaboration, mutuality, and interdependence.

Interdependence – that's a word we don't hear much because we love focusing on our independence. That's realizing we need each other. I can't do everything on my own – try as I might – and you can't do it all on your own, either. We have to do it together. It's the interdependence of the body which gets God's work done in the Church and in the world. In this season of light, of revelation after Epiphany, where we're not only trying to see God, but trying to see the Lord Jesus Christ, as we continue to rejoice in the Incarnation of God revealed in the Babe of Bethlehem, what is it that we will see about ourselves?

Epiphany, the proverbial light bulb going off, our having a sense of revelation might also be about us. It's not all external, it's also about seeing what's in us that can be useful to God. When we bring our gifts, our skills, together and put them together under the sovereignty of God, He can use us to do amazing and wonderful things! If you know what it is, then work it! Use it! If we use our gifts together, interdependently, we can't overuse them. You can't wear the gift out, because we aren't the only ones using the gift in the Church, or for the Church, and for the salvation of the world. That's what we need to be thinking about in the coming weeks – how do we tease out the giftedness of our brothers and sisters, especially here at New Hope, and speak into them so that they can use their gifts collectively for the glory of God?

Prayer: O God of steadfast love, at the wedding in Cana, Your Son, Jesus, turned water into wine, delighting all who were there. Transform our hearts by Your Spirit, that we may use the varied gifts You've given to us to show the light of Your love as one body in Christ. Amen.