



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Second Sunday after the Epiphany (C) – 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Focus: *Gifts for the Common Good*

word of life

“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. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Paul writes to a conflicted church in Corinth, knowing the practical use of spiritual gifts is a major concern. In fact, Paul devotes a significant amount of this letter (chapters 12-14) to clarify the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It seems the ability to speak in tongues (using languages never studied or heard) is considered by many in the Corinth church to be the greatest of all gifts given by God.

1. *Have you experienced someone speaking in tongues? If so, describe the setting.*
2. *What would that be like to speak in foreign languages which you never studied?*

Paul writes to inform the church of Corinth about spiritual gifts. No matter the language used, one cannot confess “Jesus is Lord” except through the power of the Holy Spirit. Although speaking in tongues is a unique and public gift, it is only one gift. Without someone who has knowledge about the language and who can interpret the spoken words, what value is that particular gift? (See 1 Corinthians 14)

The ultimate source of a spiritual gift, including the gift of speaking in tongues, is God alone.

It is God’s Holy Spirit who activates a variety of spiritual gifts within the Christian community. “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. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-5 NRSV)

3. *Name spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit.*
4. *How does God activate spiritual gifts?*

Paul methodically connects the spiritual gifts—though the gifts may be diverse—to the same Holy Spirit, to the same Lord, and to the same God. There is no need to consider oneself superior based on receiving a particular gift by the Spirit. Gifts given by the Spirit are intended not for private glory or personal gain, but for the common good.

5. *Give an example of someone who might use a spiritual gift for personal gain.*
6. *Given examples of using spiritual gifts for the common good.*

Gifts are distributed “to one . . . and to another” until all are given a gift chosen by the Spirit. Gifts vary from wisdom, faith, healing, performance of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. Notice the last two spiritual gifts mentioned on Paul’s list have to do with tongues. Rather than focusing on the gift, Paul instead emphasizes the Giver of the gifts is the same One who activates and encourages the use of spiritual gifts. People do not get to choose or hoard their gifts, but use their gifts for others.

Word among us

First-century Corinth was a large thriving community and important stop in the Mediterranean trade route. Merchants came from a variety of countries, speaking diverse languages. It is easy to imagine the early church members getting puffed up with pride when they realized their spiritual gift was speaking in tongues. There must have been something fascinating about being able to speak in foreign languages which they had never studied. But pride in their specific gifts was causing division and strife.

Take a moment to fast-forward to today's church.

1. *If Paul were writing a letter to your congregation concerning spiritual gifts, what would he write to you?*
2. *What is often misunderstood about the use of spiritual gifts?*

Take a moment to reflect on your own personal journey of discovering the spiritual gifts given to you by the Holy Spirit. (If you can't identify your spiritual gifts, consider who might guide you in a discernment process.)

3. *What circumstances or people prompted you (or encouraged you) to claim your spiritual gifts?*
4. *How might we help each other discover our spiritual gifts?*

Paul emphasizes a variety of gifts, but the singleness of the Giver of the gifts. It is the same Lord, same God, and same Spirit who activates the gifts. No matter the gift, the Giver expects the manifestation of the gift to be for the common good.

5. *Reflect on the ways individuals use (or do not use) their gifts for the common good of all.*
6. *How might we encourage each other to use our gifts for the common good?*

If reflecting on your spiritual gifts is a new concept, then you might want to make plans to explore spiritual gifts in greater detail. The next two weeks of the lectionary continue with Paul's letter to the Corinthians and focuses on spiritual gifts.

faith practice in daily life

Hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper

Paul's letter to the people of Corinth emphasizes the diversity of spiritual gifts, but the unity of purpose. The spiritual gifts given to us by God are not for our own self-interest, but for the common good. This passage is really about what it means to live in Christian community. Our lives are not our own. The community needs our particular gift.

7. *If we take seriously the words of Paul about using our gifts for the common good, what repercussions might that have for us?*
8. *How do you hope to share your gift from the Holy Spirit for the common good?*

Prayer

Giver of all, activate our gifts so that the community might be blessed. Amen

last word

This week,
write down on a piece of paper your spiritual gifts
and ways to offer those gifts for the common good.

Daily Faith Practices

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