

SERMON TITLE: “Called to Use Spiritual Gifts”

SERMON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

PREACHER: Rev. Kim James

OCCASION: January 21, 2024, at First United Methodist Church

INTRODUCTION

Back in December, we were all thinking and talking a lot about gifts. We had to buy them, wrap them, and give them away. We probably even received some gifts for ourselves. But now, a month later, gifts are a thing of the past--except if it's your birthday or anniversary, maybe. Other than the credit card bills yet to be paid off, the notion of gifts is mostly behind us.

But, just when we thought the season of gifts was over, here we find ourselves reading a passage of scripture all about gifts. Only this time, it isn't Christmas gifts we're talking about. Instead, we're talking about spiritual gifts—those gifts that come to us from God's Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul explains that he doesn't want the Christians at Corinth to be ignorant about these gifts. He wants them to be informed, so they will recognize the gifts God gives them and then use those gifts for the good of the church. I must admit, I have this same desire for us here at Ogden First United Methodist Church. So, in the first of a four-sermon series about our calling as Christians, I invite you this morning to consider that we are called to use spiritual gifts.

1—GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT ARE GIVEN TO EACH ONE

Our calling to use spiritual gifts begins with the fact that gifts of the Spirit are given to each one of us. There is no believer in Jesus Christ who hasn't been given some kind of spiritual gifts. As Paul asserts in verse seven, “*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit.*”

I start off with this basic truth because it's so easy for us to belittle ourselves and think that we have nothing to offer. We acknowledge that other people have great gifts, but then shrink in comparison. And that's wrong. God has given every one of us some interests, talents, attitudes, perspectives, and skills that are valuable and good. God has given us opportunities and energies to

make a difference. God has put within us a creativity that's longing to be used. The Holy Spirit has planted gifts in us like seeds in the ground ready to sprout and grow. We may not have developed them much yet, but spiritual gifts have definitely been given to each and every one of us.

2—THERE'S A WIDE VARIETY OF GIFTS

A second fact about these spiritual gifts we're called to use is that there's a wide variety of them. If we doubt that we have spiritual gifts, it's probably because we fail to realize the range of possibilities. If we think that the only spiritual gift is preaching, then there won't be many of us with that gift. Or if we think that spiritual gifts require musical expertise like organist Karen Miller or flutist Samantha Glenn, then very few people would qualify. But if we recognize that some people have the spiritual gift of making funeral potatoes, others have the gift of shoveling and blowing snow, and others have the gift of caring for children in the nursery, then we begin to get the picture.

There are many different spiritual gifts. Some people have the gift of planning for the distant future. Some people have the gift of cleaning the church floors or restrooms. Some people have the gift of understanding financial reports and balancing the books. Some people have the gift of visiting the sick, sending cards, or offering prayers. Others have the gift of serving goodies for fellowship. Some people have the gift of inviting new people to worship. Others have the gift of teaching Bible lessons. Some people have the gift of digital technology. Others are gifted in compassion for the needy. Others are gifted at repairing and painting the church. Obviously, the list could go on and on. Spiritual gifts are as diverse as we are—and that's a lot of variety.

3—THE GIFTS ARE ACTIVATED BY THE SAME LORD

So, we know that we're called to use our spiritual gifts because 1) gifts have been given to each one of us and 2) because there's a wide variety of gifts. A third way we know that we're called

to use our spiritual gifts is because they're all activated by the same Lord. This point is a little more complicated, but I'll try to explain it.

When Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in the Greek city of Corinth, they were recent converts to the Christian faith. They remembered how they used to worship many different idols and gods, each with its own attributes and supposed benefits. If you wanted a different benefit or gift, then you worshiped a different idol. It was an individualist and consumerist pick-and-choose mindset. People decided which gifts they wanted, and they pursued those gifts by which gods they chose to worship. People were going in all different directions.

But Paul wanted the new Christians at Corinth to understand that that the Christian faith is not like that. It isn't us choosing our gifts by choosing our god. In Christianity, there is only one God, one Lord, one Holy Spirit, who has given and activated spiritual gifts in us. We know that we are *called* to use our spiritual gifts because they don't originate in our desire to receive them. Our gifts originate in the will of God to give them. That's why they're called *gifts*.

What I'm trying to say is that, if we were the initiators of our spiritual gifts, we might all choose the very same ones, and neglect other gifts that are needed for the whole of God's work. Or, if we thought we were in charge of choosing our spiritual gifts, then we might also decide that we don't have any obligation to use them at all. It would simply be our personal choice. But spiritual gifts aren't just our decisions. God created us; put us in bodies, families, schools, jobs, churches, and other life experiences; introduced us to other people; and shaped who we've become. Yes, of course, we've each made many important decisions along the way. But there's probably more to who we are that we didn't choose than what we did choose. The point is that—however we got here now—by the grace of God we have been given some talents and skills, some knowledge and abilities. And our one same Lord is directing us and calling us to use those spiritual gifts in the purpose and unity of our one God.

Our spiritual gifts aren't small things that originate from random and unrelated sources. Our spiritual gifts are powerful because they come from the one God who created the heavens and the earth and everything that is in them. Our spiritual gifts come from the one Holy Spirit of God who breathed into every creature the breath of life. We know we're called to use our spiritual gifts because we have one Lord who is organizing, coordinating, and activating all this. It isn't just up to us. Our one God has a singular purpose, and we're called to do our part in it.

4—GIFTS ARE GIVEN FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Paul's final point in these verses, then, is that we're called to use our gifts for the common good. You can see that in verse seven. Every individual believer is a recipient, but the gifts aren't manifested for oneself alone. We aren't given gifts just to edify or please ourselves. We aren't given gifts to make ourselves financially or spiritually independent. Instead, our gifts are meant to be interconnected and shared with the other members of the church. We're all given gifts by the one same Spirit so that we can help, encourage, and build up one another—so we can supply what others lack, and so they can supply what we lack—so that, altogether, we can do the will of God.

One analogy to spiritual gifts is like the apples that grow on an apple tree. Even the best tasting apples aren't consumed by the tree that grew them. No, the apples are eaten by people, animals, birds, and bugs. Even if the apples just fall to the ground and rot, the seeds might grow into other trees. Likewise, if you have the gift of hospitality, your smile and kind words are for the welcoming, encouragement, and benefit of others. If you have knowledge, it's not for you to hoard; it's meant to be shared. If you have a song, you can sing it to lift others' spirits. If you have a strong body, you can assist someone who is frail. If you have great faith, you can inspire someone who has doubt.

We're given these talents, understandings, desires, and abilities so that we can work together in Christ's name. Our one Lord has a purpose for us, and God calls us to work together in that common goal. God gives us spiritual gifts so that we can use them for the common good.

CONCLUSION

In 1998, my husband Steve and I went to London and visited sites important in the life of John Wesley. Our tour guide showed us cemeteries, churches, and the house where John Wesley lived. We also walked along Aldersgate Street, where Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed. The tour ended at St. Paul's Cathedral, the church where Wesley had attended a Pentecost Day worship service just hours before his famous Aldersgate experience. St. Paul's Cathedral likes to think that their ministry played a small but important part in the spiritual formation of Methodism's great leader and, consequently, in the spiritual formation of all of us United Methodists ever since.

Now, with that in mind, hear this story about the reconstruction of that magnificent cathedral, after it had been destroyed by fire in the late 1600s. One day, the great English architect Sir Christopher Wren walked anonymously among his workers. The architect asked three men what they were doing. The first answered, "I'm cutting a stone." The second said, "I'm earning three shillings a day." The third man stood up tall and proud. He answered, "I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build a great cathedral to the glory of God." While the first two men were using their gifts to contribute to the work, it was the third man who truly understood his contribution. May we respond likewise, as a people called to use our spiritual gifts.