

## 1 Corinthians 12:4-13

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Sermon:

Losing 4 times in a row was all it took for me to recalibrate and go all in.

On vacation I learned a new card game and my opponent walloped me 4 times in a row. Being a competitive person, I knew I had to go all in and take some risks if I was going to turn this around and start winning. The next hand I decided I would bid no matter what cards were in my hand. I took a risk; I went big, and in two moves I won the game. At that point I was all in and 4 consecutive wins later the scorecard continues to hang

on my refrigerator! Last week Pastor Gina encouraged us to go into the deep waters, take a risk, cast our net, not for something trivial like a card game but to go all in for our faith and our faith community. Joel shared a powerful testimony of a time, while at work, when he took a risk and live out his faith in a radical way. While I missed being here in person, I am so grateful that our online presence afforded me the opportunity to watch the services later in the week and to even join the organ concert from afar!

This morning I would like to share with you my personal reason for being all in not for a game of cards but for my faith and particularly for this faith community, this church. As a little kid I wanted to change the world for the better. I wanted to create a world where no one went to bed hungry, where there was an end to violence, where other kids were given the same opportunities that I had. Because I did not grow up in the church, I dreamt of a way where people could come together in communities and have a common purpose of making the world better. I believed it surely must be possible. As I grew out my child like thinking, I discovered the church, and I was awed by the ways I saw the

church making an impact locally and globally in the name of Jesus Christ. As a teenager I participated in food collection drives, local mission trips, volunteered in soup kitchens, and heard classes and sermons that spoke to contemporary issues from a faith perspective. The church became a light for me, a place where I believed I could roll up my sleeves, join in, and make the world a better place.

Today, as I look at the world, and I look at the world my boys will live in, I know that there is a lot more work to be done. Christ has begun God's kingdom on earth, but it is not yet fully here. Amen?

I look at the division in our country, the tensions with truckers at the Canadian border, the ongoing issues with Russia and Ukraine, the lack of access to education and clean water in too many corners of the world, racial injustices, the environmental degradation, and so many other issues that cause me concern and I have to pause. I have to regroup. I have to go back to the beginning of my faith journey and ask myself if I am doing this right at all.

And my friends, time and time again when I take this pause, I am reminded in powerful ways that years ago when I accepted Christ as my

Lord and Savior, that I went all in. I went all in believing that even in the face of death and destruction, I believed in the God of new life and hope. I went all in believing that even the worst thing would not be the last thing because God would always be victorious. I went all in trusting that even when it looks like all is lost, that evil has won, that darkness shall prevail, that God would save us, that God would be triumphant, that the Light of Christ could not be overcome.

And every time I remind myself of those core beliefs, I am able to pick up the newspaper again, I can watch the news, or read the headlines and continue to press on unafraid because I have faith in Christ, and I am therefore all in in building his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. I am reminded in my core that there is a way, and it is God's way. I am reminded that I can't save the world, but Christ can, not in some magical way but right here, right now through us, the body of Christ. I am reminded that when I am all in, God can and will use me even with all of my flaws and failings.

And I believe that if I am all in, and I join with others who are all in, God can multiply our impact and together, working for a common good,

the people who follow the way of Jesus Christ can and do make the world a better place every single time we Love God, Reach People, and Serve All.

Our Scripture text this morning is attributed to the Apostle Paul. Paul's letters are windows into early Christian communities throughout Asia Minor that were struggling to define what it meant to be all in with their new life in Christ amid the old life that they were so used to living. In all of these writings, the Holy Spirit of God is the driving, motivating force, equipping persons in new and exciting ways for the new lives they had embraced in Christ. People were leading, teaching, preaching, prophesying, offering hospitality, visiting the sick. They were changing the world for the better by going places they'd never been and risking not only their reputations but their very lives in loyalty to the one in whom they had found freedom from fear, from sin and from death itself. Now, let me point out the Corinthians who are being addressed in today's Scripture were a particularly difficult congregation. On the one hand, they embraced the gifts bestowed by God with enthusiasm. On the other hand, however, being human, they had begun to compare their

gifts, and some had found reason to think of themselves as part of the spiritual elite of the congregation. They thought they were better loved by and closer to God because of their particular gift.

So, Paul has quite a job on his hands, amen? On the one hand he wanted to encourage the church to keep using the rich diversity of gifts that existed within the congregation yet at the same time remind them that these gifts of which they are so proud and boastful, are, after all, gifts for the common good of the community! Individual gifts were not about inborn talent, or their inalienable right or possession, their gifts were not something achieved through their own merit, but free and gracious gifts from God, given to them for the common good, for the up-building of the community and not for the boosting of their individual egos. In their pride and excitement over their gifts, they'd lost sight of the Giver and the Giver's purpose.

Paul reminds them of the overarching unity in their diversity that they were ignoring or had conveniently forgotten. He tells them again that their variety of gifts had all been given by the same Spirit to share with each other through belief in God revealed in the person of Jesus. It was

time for them to go back to square one, to remember that they were all in because of their unified faith in Christ and that the common goal was faithfulness to Jesus and God's way. Or as I tried to say in my children's sermon-instead of trying to prove why one ingredient of the bread which makes up Christ's body is better than the others, recognize that each ingredient is needed and necessary. Recognize that God gifts each person with the right ingredients to mix together and form a powerful and hunger filling body of Christ!

Although we know this to be truth, that doesn't make it any easier to achieve or to maintain. We know that Christ calls us to unity; but our human tendency is to separate or rank ourselves on the basis of our differences and preferences for individual priorities and interests.

Even though Scripture is clear that there is no hierarchy and that it's not all about our individual priorities, wants, and interests, Paul is not saying that we should all be identical. We are not all the same, with the same thoughts, same gifts, same ways of doing things, same ideas and interests.

Paul uses the metaphor of the body to explain their unity in diversity.

In the body of Christ, he says, Christ is the head of the body, with all others subordinate to him. All the other bodily parts, although very different one from the other, are of equal honor. For the good of the body, hands aren't feet and ears aren't eyes, but they share the work of the body, and one part is not more important than the other. They are interconnected and interdependent on one another, not in competition, because they all receive life and growth from the same Holy Spirit.

Paul's language is the language of friendship, dependence, and cooperation, not of hierarchy, individualism, or domination.

Thus, every gift, service, or activity and every person is equally important, all manifesting the one Spirit through which each is empowered for service for the common good. All of us have spiritual gifts and all rightfully can expect to have these gifts put to use in the community. Gifts are not reserved to a privileged few but are given to all.

Have you ever wondered about your gifts? Have you ever been guilty of thinking that you have no needed or useful gifts? Do you ever look around at others and think, "I could never do that! I'm just not very



talented.” There are a couple of mistakes in that kind of thinking: First mistake: comparing yourself to someone else! Always remember that you are a unique and unrepeatable miracle of God, as I said in my Young Disciples Time-you are an essential ingredient. So, comparison does not apply! Second mistake: thinking you’re not good enough! The writer Marianne Williamson has written “You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world.” I would say actually, your playing small does not serve God or God’s people, it does not further the kingdom or the work to which we are called.

I think we can rightly identify as gifts of the Spirit any aptitudes or interests we have that are informed by and energized by the Holy Spirit for the greater good, those skills and abilities which are means through which God is at work with grace and mercy for the good of all. Each of us here is gifted insofar as God’s grace and power reorient us away from ourselves and our own interests, away from our fears about our supposed inadequacies, to become agents of God’s love.

And certainly that is true of our church. I am finding that each of you is willing to share the gifts God has given you, and because of your sharing

we make a difference in our little corner of God's kingdom. We know we can change things for the better in both large and small ways through the sharing of our gifts.

In this congregation those who teach, sing, visit the sick, send cards and notes, collect food, take food and clothes to Camden, work on church committees until their eyes cross, greet visitors, pay bills, advocate for justice and equality, check to see that the lights are out and the doors are locked are all sharing their gifts for the common good. We have others who are good listeners, encouragers, and organizers. And still others who are examples of courage, patience, kindness, endurance, gentleness, grace, and love. The list of gifts that you possess goes on and on, and you express your love for God, God's people and the church in sharing them.

When I first decided to go seminary people would ask me what do you want to do? And all I knew to say is that I felt that somewhere there was a place that needed a pastor, and that if I brought my gifts, and if they brought their gifts then by working together, sharing our gifts, we would

be the church and we would make the world a better place, together, for the common good. First UMC of Moorestown is such a place.

The Spirit of God is at work in each one of us and has given different gifts to each. So, claim them! But more than that, these gifts should be identified, claimed, and celebrated. Don't hold back, go all in and put them to use for the building up of God's kingdom because they are given to us by the Spirit, not to create division, but unity, for we are one body and together we serve to the glory of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.