

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Your Gift for All

According to *USA Today*, on Wednesday, November 23, 1994, a couple named Sandy and Theresa boarded TWA flight 265 in New York to fly to Orlando and see Disney World. Theresa was almost seven months pregnant. Thirty minutes into the flight, Theresa doubled over in pain and began bleeding. Flight attendants announced that they needed a doctor; and a Long Island internist volunteered.

Theresa soon gave birth to a boy. But the baby was in trouble. The umbilical cord was wrapped tightly around his neck, and he wasn't breathing. His face was blue.

Two paramedics rushed forward to help, one of whom specialized in infant respiratory procedures. He asked if anyone had a straw, which he wanted to use to suction fluid from the baby's lungs. The plane did not stock straws, but a flight attendant remembered having a straw left over from a juice box she had brought on board the plane. The paramedic inserted the straw in the baby's lungs as the internist administered CPR. The internist asked for something he could use to tie off the umbilical cord. A passenger offered a shoelace.

Four minutes of terror passed. Then the little baby whimpered and everyone on board cheered and clapped.

The parents gave the little boy the name Matthew. Matthew means "Godsent." The people on board the plane "were all god-sends" the father said.

Indeed, God had met the need through people who gave what they had and did what they could. God usually meets needs through people.¹

This is how God works. Each person is given opportunity to use who they are, what they have, their knowledge, vocation, talents, experience, resources financial or otherwise for the good of others. When we don't use all of these pieces of who we are to help others we fall short of what God intends for our lives. It is not that we have to do everything all of the time or even run ourselves short of time, energy, resources, but we are also not to hoard our time, energy, resources, experience, knowledge, or what one might call giftedness.

The Apostle Paul writing this personal letter to the group of Christians in Corinth spends considerable time talking about how everyone has gifts specific to who they are but that

¹ Larson, Craig Brian. *Leadership Journal. 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preacher, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1993, 1996, 1998. 2002. Page 192.

not one is bigger or better than another. Rather each gift that the individuals have is to be used for the common good of others.

A couple of things here of note. Firstly, Corinth was a pretty interesting place to start a church. In the ancient world Corinth was a port city and straddled one of the Roman empire's largest and lucrative trade routes. With a population of about 700,000 people, plus the people coming and going, this city was second only to Rome itself in size. It was also a city full of corruption, greed, lust, gambling, and whatever else comes to a place that is open for business, and where money, power, and prestige are the game.

It is to this that Paul came and established one of the largest churches in the 1st century, but over time the influence of the city around them came into the church too. The whole letter to the Corinthians addresses the many difficulties and challenges that the congregation was facing. The scripture we heard read today spoke to some of those challenges and what Paul calls gifts.

Using *The Message*, a paraphrase of the Bible by Eugene Peterson, Paul wrote, "All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:

wise counsel, clear understanding, simple trust, healing the sick, miraculous acts, proclamation, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues."² Each of these things was considered a gift, though this was not an exhaustive list. It was meant as a sample of the ways people could and should use what they have been given to help others both in the church and in reaching out to help others in the community.

You see, these people were involved in a game of one-up-manship. Sort of like that game one plays as a kid where one kid says "my dad is stronger than your dad." A game many of us continue to play as adults as we buy bigger and better things, rise up in a company, or simply like to play up our importance over another, just to show we have value, worth, money, prestige, and often power.

Through a letter that included sarcasm, wit, emotional pleas, long arguments, and frank talk, along with poetry and stories about himself, Paul was attempting to get this group back on a path that was more Christ-like. To stop thinking so much about themselves as individuals, but to take what was individual gifts and use those gifts for the benefit of the whole – the whole church and the whole community in which they lived.

And why would this be important? We can live comfortably without sharing anything with anyone and it doesn't bother us. So why this?

Well, if you see yourself as a Christian, then to recognize who created you, and who made you who you are is important. It is then that you understand that all that you are, all that you have is not for selfish ambition, for your comfort alone, for your vanity or

² [The Message \(MSG\)](#). Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

self-importance in which you see yourself as the king or queen of your castle whether that be your home, business, office, classroom, place at the table, or vehicle you drive.

It doesn't matter if you were or are a football or hockey player, artist, musician, artisan, politician, business owner, minister, or keeper of the house. It doesn't matter if you are a teacher, doctor, lawyer, health care worker or front-line worker. Who you are is a gift from God for the common good of others. Again, this does not mean that you devalue yourself and your gift. Should you do that, then you will not recognize that you do have gifts of knowledge, wisdom, time, experience, energy, and talent to share with others.

What Paul might have been saying was get excited that you are a unique and gifted individual. In fact, if you don't know what you have to offer the world then you should figure that out, regardless of how young or old you are. Most of us only see a limited number of things we have to offer but what if you got really curious and determined to figure out what it is that you are called to bring to the community of faith and to the community in which you live?

Ask questions about what others see in you, what they experience of you, and rather than thinking "that's not me" ask them or ponder why this is the giftedness they see in you. We are complex people who both can think highly of ourselves and in the same breath cower at our weakness, inexperience, and lack of wisdom and knowledge. We are afraid of intimacy that allows for others to see weakness in us, and when someone does see good in us and expresses it, so often we will say something to distract from those words. Many people have a difficult time just saying "thank you" when someone says something kind or good even when one craves that affirmation.

So get excited, get curious! Age and ability are not a barrier to finding out how God is at work in you and with you. And remember this is not just for your own benefit, not that you can't benefit, but it is for the common good. Human beings are wired for relationship and interaction, our gifts are best used when they build relationship, bring healing and wholeness, opportunity and justice, hope and love to others. This is the work of the church and the work of the church in community.

Being a Christian means to be Christlike in our relationships, our care, compassion, teaching, healing, and so much more. We are not our own, and this is a gift not a hindrance. And we are not alone, the varieties of gifts are from the same Spirit and the varieties of service are from the same Lord, the varieties of activities are from the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. This is Good News! This is amazing and exciting, and for many life-changing.

Live your life in the Spirit of Jesus, as "God sent" people, learning about your gifts, using your gifts to bring Christ's light into the world. Be the good news for others of God's love, forgiveness, redemption, healing, and transforming power in the church, in the community, in the power of the one Spirit, one Lord, one God. Amen.