

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

One Body, Many Members

Three of these things belong together
Three of these things are kind of the same
Can you guess which one of these doesn't belong here?
Now it's time to play our game.

Do you remember this song from Sesame Street? There is more than one version. Another version starts with "one of these things is not like the other".

With about 8.3 billion living on planet earth, we spend a lot of time trying to distinguish ourselves from one another, we also spend a lot of time trying to be just like others. It is a constant pull. We want to stand out from the crowd and we want to be part of the crowd. We want to have our independence and we want to be part of something.

This is all intertwined with wanting to be important in some way, to have people value us, see us as valuable while also not being so different that we don't belong at least to some group of people. And when you are thinking about this, don't be so naïve as to think that people all want to be like you. Look around at the different types of communities, organizations, churches, areas of a city, and I am sure I could list more. People just want to belong somewhere while at the same time being the individual that they are.

Now I want to take you into the community that was the Corinthian church in the Apostle Paul's time. This was a niche community of faith, fledgling, trying to find their way in a city that adopted Venus, the goddess of love. A temple had been built that employed more than a thousand prostitutes. This city was one where prostitutes, strippers, gamblers and the like worked and played and where the rich got richer and more powerful. This was a city at a trade cross roads which included roads and shipping. People from all over the known world live and worked in Corinth. It was the second largest city in the Roman Empire and it was known for the kind of lifestyle that made the Corinthians the butt of dirty jokes and they were consistently portrayed as drunken brawlers. Money flowed in this city, at least through the upper echelons. It was a place where honour and merit meant more power and more money, more influence and more prestige.

Now as with every church to this day, it can be very difficult to separate the church and the world around it. We are called to be the church in the world but not always of the world. We are called to separate from the world in ways that honour our faith and the values we hold dear, but most importantly to recognize that Christ is the head of the

church and we are the body of the church. We are many members but part of something bigger.

Thinking about that, we consider what a struggle it must have been to try to be different from all that surrounded that group of people trying to be faithful to the way of Christ in a place that did not honour that kind of selfless living. The church was called to do what they did, share of themselves what they could, and the gift of themselves with the whole of the community of faith. Sounds easy enough, but culture has a way of seeping into things. Even that which is not helpful. It happened in the Corinthian church and we can still see it happening in churches that support the platforms of Christian Nationalism, or that are unduly influenced by politics the world round.

In those early years of the church in Corinth after Paul had left to continue on his missionary journeys, things started to get somewhat out of sync with the gospel message they had received from Paul. People wanted to show how the gifts that they had were more important to the church than what others had.

For a moment let's take a look at what is meant by gifts. To do that let's go back to the moment that the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples.

The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost Acts 2:1-4b

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ¹

This Spirit was given to all who were present, this included people from all over the known world. So it is that the Holy Spirit from that point on has been in the world in a new way and in the Christian Church we recognize that there are various and many gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the people of God, not just for their own edification, but for the good of the whole body that is the church, and, I would say for any other work that they are called to do in community with others.

For Christians this is about God being our God, Christ being our Lord and Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit being free to move in us and in the world as it chooses. And so, this is the lens from which we understand the work of the Holy Spirit in us, but that understanding does not limit the Spirit's work in the world.

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For the followers of Christ then as for us now, we are given gifts of the Spirit and as Paul writes, there are a variety of gifts, varieties of services, and varieties of activities, but it is the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God who activates all of them in everyone. And, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

It seems that Paul had to remind his readers that the gifts they had were not given in a hierarchy of value. That was something the followers in Corinth were losing sight of. They were bickering and challenging one another with taunts of my gift is better than your gift kind of thinking and acting. Paul wrote to remind them of many things in his letter, but one of those things was that each of them had received their gifts because of the work of the Spirit and moreover those gifts were to be used to sustain and build up the whole body that was their church.

Sometimes it happens in our churches as well. It is especially easy to think that somehow the minister is the one with all of the gifts, but let me assure that I have particularly gifts but without each and every person here, we are not the church. Whether you are here just today or this is your home. We are the body of Christ gathered in this moment. You may ask yourself, what gift or gifts do you bring today? Is it gifts of time, energy, healing, compassion, discernment, encouragement, financial, teaching? I could go on as the gifts of the Spirit are not limited to my list or the one you see in this particular scripture reading.

The point of gifts is that they are not ones we should boast about. They are given for the common good, used to sustain and build up the body that is Christ. We happen to have walls that help us identify this particular church, but may I remind you that they are people following this service online who do not enter this place. They are, you are, part of the body this is our church. How can those who follow that way contribute their gifts to the world of the church, this one, or in other ways.

How are the gifts of us here today to be used in the broader, wider church, because the church is not limited to St. Andrew's. The church is more than the Presbyterian denomination; the church is all of those who call ourselves Christian in this city and area. The fellowship of Christ spans the globe. We may think that our gifts cannot possibly have any impact on the church worldwide. However, could it be that our acts of service, compassion, justice and love have a ripple effect so that all who encounter us come to know about the grace of God?

In the power of the one God, one Lord, and one Holy Spirit we are one body in Christ. **All** of us are children of God. Every person has gifts of the Spirit. In the church we recognize and celebrate this. We look to each other to supply the gifts needed to share the grace, forgiveness, love, and compassion of God with each other and the community around us. If you think you don't have any gifts, let me suggest that you do, and God wants to use those gifts to bless people. Others can help you discern what those gifts are.

On this Pentecost Sunday may we be willing to feel the wind of the Holy Spirit among us. Maybe we will even catch a little fire! 😊

We are many people but one body. One body in Christ, in God, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God for trusting us to be the hands, feet, heart, lungs, mouth, ear, eyes, and more in the world in praise of God, while we change the world with faith, hope, and love. Amen