

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. We commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

➤ ***Gathered in the love of Christ***

Call to Worship

How precious is God's steadfast love!

We will find refuge in the shelter of God's wings.

Come and feast on God's abundance.

We will drink from the river of God's delights.

For with God is the fountain of life;

And in God's light we will see light.

Let us worship God with joy and thanksgiving!

We will bring God our prayers and our praise with hearts full of love.

➤ ***Immortal, invisible, God only wise*** **290**

† Prayer and Words of Hope

With you, Enduring Lord, we find our refuge. In the shelter of your compassion, we are made whole – in the abundance of your grace, we are fed – in the depths of your living waters, we are shaped into new people.

With you, Holy God, we are filled to the brim. Our lips cannot contain our praise – our hearts overflow with your spirit – our lives are poured out for others.

Living Spirit, we find our common life in this faith community. United by a common confession, we take our uncommon gifts and hope to share them in serving your will.

Triune God, we gather in worship week by week, seeking your refreshing presence. But we confess sometimes we are discouraged by things happening around us. We don't expect your presence to make a difference for us. Forgive us when we give up on you and end up feeling unfulfilled. By your grace, refresh us when we are weary or worried, and renew our trust in you. **Amen**

Hear the good news! No power in heaven or on earth can separate us from God's great love. Take heart, and know that you are forgiven.

➤ *The steadfast love of the Lord (refrain only – repeat) 20*

† Prayer for Understanding

O God of steadfast love, at the wedding in Cana Jesus turned water into wine, delighting all who were there. Transform our hearts by your Holy Spirit, that we may use our varied gifts to show forth the light of your love as one body in Christ. Open us to your Holy Word we pray. Amen

Scripture

1 Corinthians 12: 1-11 [NT 174]

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

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.

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 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. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

John 2: 1-11 [NT 93]

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”

And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.”

His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.

He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it.

When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom

and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

As a whole, Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth is an impassioned plea for unity. The church is fraying at the seams, unable to handle — much less celebrate — its rich diversity. This got me thinking about our society as a whole these days. It often seems to be fraying at the seams and unable to celebrate the rich diversity with which we are blessed. In the section of the letter we read this morning, Paul confronts one of the problems dividing the community: the problem of spiritual elitism — of specialness — and reminds them what their gifts are for — to benefit the community — for the common good. And that is the other thing that connects this text to our experience for me — the common good. I feel lately a bit overwhelmed with the fractiousness of what is out there in the news and on social media and even in myself. Too much of our focus seems to be on ourselves and what is best for us — for me, my city, my province, my country — when it might be best — even opportune, especially during a pandemic, to aside our peevishness and work even harder toward what is of benefit to everyone and everything in creation. So, let’s look at Paul’s take on the diversity of gifts and his call for mutuality to see if it can lead us in these challenging times...

Paul notices that the church assumes an implicit hierarchy when it comes to gifts. Congregants with flashier, louder, more “ecstatic” abilities — like the ability to speak in tongues — consider themselves superior to those whose gifts are quieter, less visible, or more mundane. These self-described spiritual “superheroes” believe that their gifts are a sign of God’s special favor. A sign that they deserve more authority, status, and power in the church than those who don’t speak in tongues, perform miracles, or utter prophecies.

At first glance, this toxic first-century mess in Corinth might seem irrelevant to us. We don’t spend our Sunday mornings fighting over the gift of tongues. However, we do sometimes still have a fraught relationship with giftedness. Don’t we have hierarchies of our own when it comes to the talents and abilities we admire most? In what ways do we equate giftedness with divine favor or blessing? And does this just apply in the church, or could we extrapolate a bit to think about how giftedness — specialness — is viewed in our society as a whole?

We live in cultures and communities that encourage us to envy, worship, or become superheroes. We learn early on to hoard, compete, compare, and judge. We learn to think of “giftedness” as something we deserve — something we inherit at birth or earn by sheer effort.

In many of our contemporary contexts, the end goal of giftedness is privilege, status, and adoration. To be gifted is to be set apart, elevated far above the ordinary. Our gifts are seen as being for our own edification, pleasure, gain, and reward.

But Paul's constant goal is to call the Corinthians to understand their corporate existence as the church – their community. When we read his words, we must hear ourselves addressed as a group – not as individuals, but as members of a community that confesses “Jesus as Lord.” Paul is working toward bringing the disorderly and self-centered worship practices of the Corinthians under control so that the church as a whole can be nourished. And I want us to see an even bigger picture – how can our gifts be used to benefit the larger community – our city, province, country, or world? How do we live using our gifts for the common good?

Paul doesn't prioritize gifts – some can run a meeting, others sing with enthusiasm or play an instrument, some listen compassionately, others speak the truth in love, some organize events, others participate with joy. The key is to remember that all we are, all we do, all we can be is from God and not of our own creation. And the amazing thing is that is just as true of the person sitting next to you or the person participating in worship from home as it is of you. Whatever is in us to contribute comes from the Spirit for the good of the whole community of faith – the building up of the church and the world – for the common good.

What exactly is the common good? It is a phrase frequently used in discussions of problems within society just as Paul uses it in this letter. The common good is a notion that originated in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. More recently a contemporary ethicist defined the common good as “*certain general conditions that are... equally to everyone's advantage*”. The common good is about having the social systems, institutions, and environments on which we all depend, work in a manner that benefits all people – an accessible and affordable public health care system – effective systems of public safety and security – peace among the nations of the world – a just legal and political system – an unpolluted natural environment – a flourishing economic system.

As these examples suggest, the common good does not just happen. Establishing and maintaining the common good requires the cooperative efforts of many people. But these efforts pay off, for the common good is a good to which all members of society have access, and from whose enjoyment no one can be easily excluded.

It might seem that since everyone benefits from the common good, we would all willingly respond to urgings that we each cooperate to establish and maintain the common good. But there are a number of obstacles that hinder us. Maybe we all have different ideas of what constitutes a common good – perhaps not everyone commits to doing their share or some think they are asked to do or give up too much – possibly it is just our intense sense of individualism that gets in our way.

The idea of the common good challenges us to view ourselves as members of the same community and, while respecting and valuing the freedom of individuals to pursue their own goals, to recognize and further those goals we share in common. I read that Newsweek columnist Robert J. Samuelson once wrote: *“We face a choice between a society where people accept modest sacrifices for a common good or a more contentious society where groups selfishly protect their own benefits.”* And that, *“The common good has been an important ethical concept in a society that has encouraged many to ‘look out for Number 1.’ Everywhere, it seems, social commentators are claiming that our most fundamental social problems grow out of a widespread pursuit of individual interests.”*

The Corinthians placed a high value on Christian freedom. Having heard the gospel message that Christ had fulfilled the old law, they proudly proclaimed, *“All things are lawful for me” – I can do whatever I want.* Paul does not deny this claim absolutely, but insists that to it must be added, *“But not all things are beneficial” – not everything we might desire is helpful for the common good.* What is appropriate to the individual in the liberation resulting from God’s salvation may not be appropriate for the welfare of the group. Paul discusses this point in connection with sexual relations in chapter six, food sacrificed to idols in chapter ten and here in chapter 12 he refers to the diversity of spiritual gifts. He maintains that every gift is given for the common good and must be exercised for the sake of the ministry to the whole community. As soon as God’s gifts – God’s grace – is treated as something to possess for private thrills or personal power, that grace – those gifts – are corrupted and begin to cause dissension.

Paul addresses the readers of his letter as brothers and sisters – siblings. They were a community divided, exploiting one another, some seeing themselves as more righteous – yet Paul calls them one body in Christ. It is a reminder that as we seek to live in Christian community, we are bound to experience conflicting opinions, visions, and attitudes – it was normal in Paul’s time, and it is normal today. The thing is that Paul would not want us to spend our time focusing on who has which gifts to offer – he would prefer that we simply be about the business of giving thanks for and celebrating those gifts – using them in service to the community – for the common good.

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

Here is great, great gospel for a world that knows so much division: God gifts us and those around us with various manifestations of the Spirit for the good all people – not just Christians. In a culture that encourages people to use our abilities to advance only ourselves or our causes, 1 Corinthians 12 summons God’s dearly beloved people – summons us – to use the abilities with which God graces us for the welfare of everyone – for the common good.

Paul reminds us that no matter with which manifestations of the Spirit God has graced us, God did so for the well-being of all people. God intended that the talents the Spirit shares with God’s people benefit everyone because God graciously longs for all people and creatures – for all of

creation – to flourish. The God who is already making all things new graciously invites us to partner in accomplishing God’s good, loving, and sovereign purposes for all creation.

There are many gifts, and one Spirit. May we bind ourselves to this beautiful and essential truth and find new ways to seek the common good together.

Please join me in prayer...

Gracious God, we unite in prayer gladly even as we acknowledge our diversity. Help us to embrace your many and varied gifts – to use them as you desire. Help us to appreciate the different gifts of others, remembering that your Holy Spirit comes to each one of us. Teach us to always seek the common good – to pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding [Romans 14:19]. We pray thankfully and with confidence because your abundance blesses us through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen

➤ ***We are one in the Spirit*** **471**

† Offering Invitation

God offers us many gifts through the same Spirit so that, together, we may serve in Jesus’ name. Trust that what you have to give, God will bless in faithfulness and fruitfulness.

➤ ***Praise God from whom all blessings flow*** **306**

† Offering Prayer

God of grace and mercy, receive all our gifts, offered in thanksgiving. We share the fruit of our labours with you, asking that you will multiply their effects in and through the Church. And we share the fruit of our time and talent, seeking to know how you would have us serve in Jesus’ name.

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord’s Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for each good gift you give to us. We thank you for the abilities and talents that we know we have, and for those that we do not believe we have – gifts which those who love us tell us we have.

Help us, O God, to accept the expression of your Spirit in our lives – to use, in faith and in trust, the gifts you have given us. Through these gifts, and by the diversity of gifts that we see in one another, enable us to build up our church and minister within our community.

Holy One we thank you for calling us together as a one body – one church – giving to us individually the gifts we need to care for one another, and our world.

We pray for the church... may abundant love flow in our prayers and may our prayers flow into generous words and deeds.

We pray for this community of faith... especially those among your children who experience pain, and whose sleep is at the best fitful.

We pray for the community in which we live... bless those people who are drawn to Christ and new life, yet fear the scorn of family, friends or workmates.

We pray for the broken world around us in which we are called to show your healing love and saving power...

We pray for the people we know and love... especially those we remember now in silence...

Bless us, O God as we, with much trembling, hand our lives over to you again this day. Fill us with faith and courage for the days to come as we pray together ...***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen***

➤ ***With the Lord as my guide*** **574**

Blessing

Go into the world spreading the good news that God is in our land – confessing with joy that Jesus is indeed Lord. And may the grace of the Living Lord, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ ***Go now in peace (round)*** **622**