

Text: I Corinthians 12: 1-11
Title: Common Good
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Let's begin where we ended.

Let's pick up where we left off last week.

You belong to God in Christ.

Therefore, you belong to one another ~ the Body of Christ.

And, baptism is a tactile sign and seal of that reality.

With a splash of water to remember, that's where we ended last week.

And this morning?

Beautiful, Iris Evelyn, you belong to God in Christ.

You belong to the Body of Christ.

Your baptism is a sign and seal of that reality.

Thanks be to God.

Well, let's begin where we ended and consider what it means to belong to one another.

What does it mean that this is a communal undertaking?

What are the gifts and responsibilities of belonging to the body of Christ?

We're going to spend the next 6 weeks.... (I know, scares me too. Seems like a long time.) We're going to spend the next 6 weeks considering the last third of Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. He's writing about the personal, problematic, and practical implications of belonging to one another. We're going to consider those implications as recorded in chapters 12 through 15 for the next 6 weeks.

Good?

First a little context...

Corinth was a cosmopolitan commercial center on an isthmus between two port cities. The goods of east and west were exchanged through Corinth. It was religiously, culturally, economically, and ethnically diverse. It was a colorful, meeting place for seafarers, merchants, and soldiers, with a reputation for a vigorous prostitution trade. Notorious for bawdy behavior, the Greek term *corinthiazesthai* ~ to live a Corinthian life ~ was not a term of endearment, but a reference to immorality. When Paul wrote in Romans:

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless....

he was in Corinth.

Paul lived there for a few years and the little Corinthian Christian community he left behind was soon fractured by theology, class, political perspective, ethnicity, and a kind of spiritual enthusiasm that led some to feel superior about their experience and condescending toward others.

So, about three years later Paul wrote back in response to questions about division, incest, lawsuits, marriage, food offered to idols, resurrection, virgins, collections, and worship practices, etc. Paul wrote back about a hodge-podge of problems and predicaments. Our text this morning picks up on one of those tensions. Namely, what are we to make of the gifts of God's spirit?

It seems that in Corinth some were boasting about what God was doing in their lives, some were comparing gifts, and some were getting carried away with ecstatic utterances. In turn there were those who were probably jealous of the experience of others and some wondered why their spirituality was so subdued. There were those who were indifferent and some who just wanted to get on with their lives. And to all of those people, and all those perspectives, and all of those dispositions, Paul writes that:

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all people. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

The Greek word here for gift is *charismata*. The root of which is grace. It means something like “grace gift” or “gift of grace.” It has the sense that

not because you earned it or deserve it,
not because you've gone to school or honed a skill,
not because of you,
but because of God,
you're gifted.

God has given you gifts.

Not just the gifts of health and strength and daily bread, but some other quality, some other reality, something beyond your natural grasp ~ some *charismata*. Paul lists some of those gifts in our text, but the list is not meant to be exhaustive. They're just examples. The gifts of the Spirit are littered throughout scripture ~ serving, teaching, encouragement, mercy, giving, discernment, healing, etc. There are about twenty gifts mentioned in the New Testament and there is no reason to think those are the extent of God's giving.

So, let's add on to where we left off....

You belong to God in Christ.
You belong to one another.
And, you are gifted by God.
By the indwelling of God's spirit you are uniquely gifted.

Some examples?

Every time that I go see one of Hope's elderly saints who's living in a care facility, they tell me about how Fern Kuiper had been by to help them with this detail or that detail. I don't know what that gift for care is called, but Fern Kuiper has it in spades.

In the last two weeks our singing has been led by violin, clarinet, cajón, guitar, cello, flute, trumpet, and the voices of children. I know each player is a gifted musician but Erin Pacheco's touch at pulling all of those musical voices together is a gift of the Spirit.

Spend any time with Jordon Maloni and you're going to laugh. You're going to get drawn into his infectious energy for people and stories and fun and laughter. Watch how humor charges and changes a human dynamic and it's hard to see it as anything other than a gift of God's spirit.

Almost every week Ray Aardema gets roped into fixing something here at church. Mechanical, electrical, plumbing, heating and cooling, construction, etc., Ray's usually able to figure it out and fix it. Sure, Sharon's the one who calls him, but he keeps showing up and he keeps things humming along. I'm hard pressed not to call that a gift of the Spirit.

There are all sorts of other examples.

I could go on all day.

You get the idea.

It's easy to get caught in the traps of jealousy or inferiority or uncertainty. We often fall into comparing how our giftedness stacks up against the giftedness of others. And, too often we decide that we don't have the gifts that others value or that make any difference. In response churches have developed spiritual gift inventories ~ tools to help you uncover the gift that God has given you....

And that all seems well and good.

We should probably do something similar.

But, I want to draw your attention to a phrase that easily gets lost in our text:

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

You're gifted by the Spirit for the common good.

You're gifted not for your glory or the even for the glory of God. You're gifted not for some ethereal import but for the welfare and interests of others. I know that flies in the face of a culture wherein individual freedoms and the pursuit of personal fulfillment are the highest goods, and I know that it may not seem spiritual enough, but as those who belong to God in Christ you are gifted for the common good. Pope Francis calls the Body of Christ, "artisans for the common good."

“Our God Reigns: A Contemporary Testimony” puts it this way:

God the Spirit lavishes gifts on the church in astonishing variety—prophecy, encouragement, healing, teaching, service, tongues, discernment—equipping each member to build up the body of Christ and to serve our neighbors.

Hope’s Adult Education Hour, faithfully led by Roger Weirs and Bob Rice, is a veritable cornucopia of diverse and colorful topics. From science to cinema, from public policy to church polity they offer presentation and conversation with a plethora of artisans of the common good.

In one of those Adult Education presentations Val Bosscher, Iris Evelyn’s mother, talked about her work at the EPA and the bureaucratic struggle to ensure clean drinking water. When she talked about the science I had no idea what she was talking about, but I couldn’t be more thankful that she’s using her gifts for the common good.

For my money....

That’s *charisma*.

That’s exercising a gift of God’s spirit.

That’s in keeping with God’s reign and will for creation.

Now, I ran down many-a-rabbit-hole this week in thinking about the common good. Some variation of the phrase goes back to Aristotle and gets picked up by almost every philosopher or political theorist thereafter. It has come to mean all sorts of things. And truth be told, it is hard to know exactly what Paul meant by his use of the phrase. By the way, it gets translated in the King James version as “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to profit withal.” Who’s to know how far the circle of the common good extends? I can’t imagine that it ends at the boundaries of the church....

But, let me suggest that one of our highest callings and greatest challenges is to help each child, entrusted in our care, to identity, develop, and use their gifts. What a wonderful responsibility.

How might Iris Evelyn,

who belongs to Christ,
and belongs the Body of Christ,
and is baptized into the reality....

how might she use the gifts that God has given and will give for the common good?

And how can we help her in that journey?

Dear friends, lets pick up where we left off.

You belong to God in Christ.

You belong to each other.

And, each one of you is gifted by the Spirit of God.

For the common good.

Thanks be God.

Amen.