

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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We Are The Church - Gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 & Matthew 18:1-5

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### ***1 Corinthians 12:4-11***

*<sup>4</sup> 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.*

### ***Matthew 18:1-5***

*18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup> He called a child, whom he put among them, <sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*

Who is the greatest?

Do you measure greatness by knowledge or confidence? By power or wealth? By kindness or compassion.

I suspect before you answer that question you would want to know more. What is the context? What is the category?

Generally speaking humans are pretty interested in knowing who is the greatest. Greatest athlete. Greatest band. Greatest actress. Greatest author. Greatest student. We focus on this question a lot. And then we pick out who is the greatest among us and present an award.

What if Christians named the greatest Christian? Greatest teacher? Greatest servant? Greatest musician?

In our reading from 1 Corinthians today we get a peak into the Corinthian church. Corinth was a big city, a trading center, filled with people from all different backgrounds, languages and beliefs.

One of the conflicts the church in Corinth was dealing with was about who was the greatest. Those Christians in the church who were speaking in tongues were lifted up by some as the greatest because their gift was seen as a sign that the Holy Spirit was with them.

This argument over who had the greatest gift was enough to divide this community. Because if the people speaking in tongues had the greatest gift, maybe that meant that they carried God's authority and were most important in the community. That's a pretty big deal.

In the Lutheran Christian tradition we are not overly familiar with the gift of speaking in tongues but we can certainly understand the ways that people try to determine who is the greatest in all kinds of communities including the church.

In response to this argument over who had the greatest gift Paul writes that all gifts are important and needed. Hear his words again: "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."

God has given each one of us gifts by the power of the Holy Spirit to do God's work, caring for one another, sharing God's love and knitting us all together.

So what are your gifts? And what are your neighbor's gifts? In my own study over the years of gifts and working with others as they discover their own gifts I have found two things to be essential.

First, it's important to discover your gifts and share them. And second, to live together fully and work together as God's people we each need to know the gifts that all the people around us have been given as well.

When we learn about spiritual gifts from the early church we find a long list of gifts that are all equally important and equally needed among God's people for the sake of the whole world.

Over time Christians have added to this list so depending on who you ask you may come up with a slightly different list.

Here are the 18 spiritual gifts that we find listed in the New Testament in no particular order: Knowledge, Wisdom, Discernment, Faith, Healing, Tongues, Interpretation of Tongues, Evangelism, Prophecy, Teaching, Exhortation, Administration, Mercy, Shepherding, Giving, Serving, Apostleship, and Miracles.

You may already recognize some of these gifts as gifts you have been given. Or you may hear this list and be more aware of what gifts you don't have. Both ways of looking at spiritual gifts are important.

Discovering your gifts can help you live out God's calling for you and guide you in finding your place in this community. If you have the gifts of mercy and discernment you may be just the person needed to work with a homeless family. Or your gift for evangelism and sharing your story and God's story may be just the example a group of youth need. Perhaps your gift is healing and you find yourself drawn to people around you dealing with illness, praying for them and supporting them. The gifts God gives us and the way they can be used are wide and varied and all essential.

And when you know what gifts you don't have, God's gifts in others become an amazing resource. If you see a need for hospitality or knowledge or administration God shows us that we can seek out another person who has those gifts and invite them to share their gifts. Sometimes we see gifts in others that they don't see in themselves. Inviting people to share their gifts, gifts they may not even know they have, is one of the blessings of this Christian community we call the church.

Paul speaks today of the church being the body of Christ. The church is like a human body where everything works together to form the body and every part is needed.

In the body of Christ everyone belongs and everyone is needed. This congregation and this community and this world needs all the gifts God gives and works best when we use our gifts together.

We are the church, a church that has been given important gifts to do God's work in the world.

Now we are reminded today that in every community there comes the temptation and the desire to figure out who is the greatest, or the best, or the most loved, or the most important. It was true for the church in Corinth and true for Jesus' first disciples.

In our gospel reading from Matthew today the disciples ask Jesus to solve their debate over "who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

And Jesus surprises them by not picking any of the disciples. He goes off the grid. Skips the multiple choice. Instead, Matthew's gospel tells us, <sup>2</sup> He called a child, whom he put among them, <sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

Now children are not the people in our community who typically have the most power or strength or wealth or knowledge. Children are vulnerable, need to be cared for, and can be open to love in ways that adults aren't always able to be. Jesus says that God finds greatness in humility, in vulnerability, in love.

In God's church, God's kingdom, God's family there is no competition to determine who is the greatest. God's church is a community of people who work together, share their gifts and practice humility and vulnerability and love.

Without you, this congregation, this community, God's very kingdom is not whole. All of us are needed to be the church. And all of our gifts working together is God's vision and God's plan for God's work to continue and God's love to be shared.

So know today God's promise that you are God's own creation, given gifts from the Holy Spirit that live in you. You have a special place in this community and in God's kingdom. Discover with the eyes and ears and hands and heart of a child who you are and what gifts God is calling you to share. And then look around and help your neighbor to do the same. We are the church with gifts to share!

Amen.