

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight O Lord, you who are rock, redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen. (Ps 19:14)

Grace and Peace AND A Happy New Year be with you, dear Friends!

Three quick check-in questions: How is it with your soul? How did you let your light shine this week? How did your Star Word speak into your life? (There's a star word for you if you haven't received one...just let me know or contact the office.) Finally, have you tried one of the Spiritual Gift Assessments?

We are continuing in a series focused on **Gifts from God**.

The Star Word was an entry point.

Last week we focused on the Gift of Presence – God with us, Christ with us, Spirit with us. And, we are invited to 'let our light shine' so all may know that Love has come. This is our calling as followers of Christ – to **BE** God's people and share the good news of love with others so that they, too, are transformed by God's love. We are to **BE** signs of God's Presence in our words and actions when we participate as a member of a particular faith community and its work by our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

All throughout scripture we hear how God calls ordinary, everyday people to something. Here's the thing: God promises not only to call us, but also to equip us to be able to do what is asked. One of the ways we are equipped is through Spiritual Gifts.

Today we continue with the text 1 Corinthians 12 (12-31a) that is one of the primary passages that speak about spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is: a unique

ability that is given by God through Holy Spirit to believers in Jesus for the purpose of bringing glory to God and strengthening God's church.¹

John Wesley wrote Spiritual gifts flow 'from one fountain', the Holy Trinity²: the Holy 'Spirit', the 'Lord Jesus', and 'God' the Father (v4-6). These gifts are deployed under the guidance of the Spirit (v11).

So to be clear... Gifts are given to each of us to be used for ALL of us. The Scriptures that reference spiritual gifts do so in the context of a group or community. "Chosen people," "holy nation," "Body of Christ," "common good" are all plural terms that remind us that we belong to each other, and that gifts are to be used for others.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the spiritual gifts because the faithful were misusing their gifts. Their contention was leading to division. It can be easy to forget that God's Gifts are essential for the healthy functioning of the church.

Remember, Spiritual gifts are recognized and affirmed by the Body of Christ. The church has a role in steering and affirming the use of our gifts in ways that strengthen the church to be healthy. In a similar way, the church also offers guidance when perceived gifts are detrimental or not producing healthy function.

Paul speaks to the Corinthians with a metaphor commonly used to compare social or political entities in the Roman Empire – the physical body. He emphasizes the diversity AND the interdependence of members that form one body. However, Paul's use of the analogy reflects the way God acted on the cross to turn status distinctions upside down (22-24). The people are reminded that God's purpose is to lead every member to be mutually concerned for every other member, sharing in one another's suffering, rather than causing others to suffer as some were doing.

Paul states his thesis plainly... You are the body of Christ and parts of each other (v27). Like pieces of a puzzle or the members of a band, choir or

¹ Shirley Giles Davis. *God.Gifts.You*. 2018.39.

² Wesley, *Notes* 12:4.

orchestra, together, united in purpose, each member has a valuable part to play to achieve that purpose. A couple quick examples:

- 1) Visualize a puzzle and there's an open spot, but no more pieces. It is incomplete.
- 2) A few weeks ago we had one household from the choir out due to a cold, the usual 6 was now 4.
- 3) Imagine the Handbell Choir, without one of the ringers. The other evening during rehearsal, one ringer had to step out for a brief phone meeting. We kept practicing, but when that ringer's part was to be heard, there was no melody...Talk about a missing piece!

Paul speaks about UNITY & DIVERSITY; the church needs both to be healthy and full of vitality to accomplish its ministry/its mission/its purpose.

Unity: the quality or state of not being multiple: oneness; a condition of harmony : [accord](#); combination of parts into a whole; singleness in purpose or direction; DIVERSITY: the quality or state of having many different forms, types, ideas, etc.; the condition of having or being composed of differing elements : [variety](#); the state of having people who are different races or who have different cultures in a group or organization³

We are the church. Not the building...not the structure or its property.

We are the church...the body of Christ...the hands and feet that work together building God's kin-dom.

We are intended to work together...not in isolation...as a team.

Jesus did not roam the countryside by himself. He called others to join him, follow him. He didn't invite people from the same town, but people from a range of backgrounds to accompany him.

Jesus and his disciples were a team who did life together, learning, growing, and being transformed. Daily life in the early church shared in fellowship, meals, prayer, serving people, sharing joy of the good news.

³ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

Have you spent time thinking on what God is calling you to do within the ministry of Saint James UMC? Have you thought about how your unique talents may serve the work of this faith community?

I want to, once again, invite you to complete a Spiritual Gifts inventory. We sent them out this week. [GodGiftsYou.com – Discipleship Ministries.]

What part of the body are you?

Know this: you are unique; you are set apart for God; You are called and equipped by God. No one can do you but you. We are given these spiritual gifts by God “to equip God’s people for works of service so the body of Christ may be built up...become mature” (Eph 4:11-13)...and to bring glory to God. Truly, the church is more organism than organization.

Working together, in unity and peace, brings glory to God.

Friends, How will you shine your light this week because of this Word? May it be so. So be it. Amen.

Leading Into Prayer Let us JOIN voices TOGETHER once again, to make room for the prayers for God’s people, church & world, As we sing: “We Are the Body of Christ” **TFWS 2227** (*in the worship guide, or on the screen.*

THE LITURGIST, Barbara Cook, will LEAD us in prayers for God’s people, church & World ...