

Epiphany 2
Year C 2019

1 Cor 12:1-11
John 2:1-11

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

We begin today's readings from the New Testament with Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. Corinth, located not that far from Athens, served as one of the bases, along with Antioch, for Paul's beginning mission to the eastern Mediterranean.

Corinth had been destroyed earlier by the Romans and then rebuilt as a colony to which the Roman patricians sent the dregs of the surplus population from Rome.

These included recently freed slaves and exiled peasants.

By the time of Paul's arrival, Corinth was a major urban center with a robust east-west trade and the epicenter of Roman imperial culture in Greece.

Paul, along with several assistants, including Timothy, Silvanus, Phoebe, and Prisca and her husband Aquila, taught in several communities that gathered in different homes.

Paul then began travelling around the region and troubles ensued.

We know this from Paul's letters addressing concerns of those in these communities that began to struggle with different issues.

This brings us to today's epistle.

The issue we hear in today's epistle appears to be a bit of one upmanship amongst certain individuals' spiritual gifts.

It would seem that one or more of the members of the church in Corinth are trying to rank the spiritual gifts evident in the community.

Paul's response also indicates that there is a question as to the church's understanding about spiritual gifts.

At that time, many members were competing with other members on a variety of issues.

Some claimed that they were better than others because of their special spiritual gifts.

The problem, it seems, from Paul's response, is they do not understand that the essence of spiritual gifts is that they are for the common good.

The members have failed to discern what the Spirit wanted them to do.

This is the context in which Paul responds to the issue of spiritual gifts.

Paul acknowledges various gifts necessary for the church but is compelled to remind the members that the church needs diverse gifts and the works related to spiritual gifts.

In essence, he urges the members to recognize the array of gifts and cooperate with one another using their spiritual gifts for the works that benefit the common good.

According to Paul, “There are varieties of services, but the same Lord.”

“Services” is translated from the singular of the Greek *diakonia* (which means a service or ministry).

All works and ministry in the church are part of *diakonia*. ‘

What was Paul saying to the church in Corinth?

What does Paul’s epistle to the church in Corinth have to say to us, here today?

Whoever does the work of the Spirit or whatever is done out of spiritual gifts must reflect the work of Jesus, who is the foundation of the church.

It’s the same message then as now:

Jesus’ faithful life serving the weak and oppressed should be a constant reminder to all who work in the name of Jesus.

Paul is explicit as to the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit, which is “for the common good.”

Thus, gifts are not to be used for self-promotion or selfish reasons.

Rather, they must be used for strengthening the community by taking care of the weak and the despised in society.

The outcast, the demonized, the forgotten and the forlorn.

It is for the common good,
that which is best for all,
that the Spirit bestows spiritual gifts.

Paul also emphasizes that
the purpose of different gifts of the Spirit
is to make the church stronger and useful to more people.

The community is at its best
when each gift is being used as intended - for the good of all.

We here at St. Andrew's have been blessed
with a community imbued with many spiritual gifts.

Pastoral, social justice, faith,
knowledge, inquiry, welcome
and aesthetics, to name just a few.

We know, beyond doubt,
that we are better, healthier, happier,
and more engaged,
when we each are using our spiritual gifts
alongside each other for the common good.

It's evident when things become unbalanced,
forgotten or not attended to that we are failing
to work together for the common good.

When we fail to properly use the gifts bestowed
we fail to reflect the work of Jesus.

It's the same message then as now:

Jesus' faithful life dedicated to
serving the weak and oppressed.

On this holiday weekend
As we remember the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,
We can look to the life of a man who surely can be credited
With modeling the use of his gifts
For the benefit of the common good.

We knew then, and know even better now,
That when we demonize, diminish, or deny the worth
Of any population of our brothers and sisters
We too are unworthy of the gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit.

What we learned from the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
and his partners replicates what Paul wrote to the church in
Corinth and what he tells us here today:

Whoever does the work of the Spirit or whatever is done out of
spiritual gifts must reflect the work of Jesus.

The life of Jesus confirms for us that God's intent is that we dedicate ourselves to work for the common good.

Work that erases all divisions between haves and have nots.

We know much work is still needed to erase divisions between the races,
those who accumulate vast wealth and those who live in poverty,
those who are considered citizens or illegals,
those who exercise political power and
those who are unable to access their right to vote,
and many many others.

Our gathering together to join with each other in the eucharist reminds us time and time again of the powerful gifts we have been given and the power of those gifts to transform for the common good.

Martin Luther King realized the power of the church
When it best emulates the life of Jesus.

I leave you with the words of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

Church: It's not the place you come to it's the place you go from.