



The Nourishing Vocation Project

Engaging the Living Word

[1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#)

What is this particular text?

- Teaching within the context of a pastoral letter
 - Response to a concern or controversy
 - Addresses common needs of Christian community
- Theology
 - Exposition on spiritual gifts
 - Origin of spiritual gifts
 - Purpose of spiritual gifts
 - Gifted for the sake of others
 - Gifted *so that* those gifts might be used in service to the Gospel
 - Addresses unity amid difference and division

How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- Connects spiritual gifts and giftedness with holy purposes
- Connects spiritual gifts to the gift-giver identified in a Trinitarian formula
 - Same Spirit, same Lord, same God
- Demonstration that the God is at work in and through the giftedness of God's people
- God's creative work, begun in *creation* continues in and through the gifts given to God's people
- Exposition on what it means that we are "created co-creators"

How can this text function in the church today?

- Wisdom for unity amid division in any context
- Celebrate and uplift the variety of gifts manifest in the church
- Opportunity to discern anew what gifts people have and how they are called to use them
- Explore what the common good means today
- Explore how gifts can be used for the common good
- Discern how gifts of the church fit together for the common good

What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- Tempted to read too quickly with the assumption that "I know this text"
- Makes me wonder what gifts I have overlooked in myself or others
- "For the common good" feels like both a weight and a gift
 - It points me toward purpose
 - It checks me to ask myself, "am I using the gifts that I have been given in this way?"
- Sometimes makes me envious of gifts I have not received
- Makes me curious about my own gifts and the gifts of others
- Humbles me to make room for the gifts of others

- Encourages me to use my gifts, complementary to others' gifts

What do you have to say to the text?

- Sounds good on paper: difficult to celebrate in practice
- We don't talk about the Spirit enough
- Variety of gifts, services, and activities paints a beautiful picture
- Each one – no one is left out of giftedness~

What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- Pieces of the human puzzle connected by God's giftedness
- It is God who does the gifting
- We are gifted for a purpose beyond ourselves
- Common good supersedes personal gain or satisfaction

What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)

- I'm not convinced that people see or embrace their giftedness *for the common good*
- "Common good" is not uniformly understood
- Too many churches do not talk about the Spirit enough
- Giftedness in the church gets reduced to tangibles – time, talent, treasure
 - Often without deep personal or collective discernment
 - Often without given time to wonder together, "now what does this mean?"
- Too many "gifts" are used to divide or drive wedges between people, rather than for the common good
- Crises of our current time
 - Ideologically divided society
 - The Church is no longer a trusted voice
 - There is no collective understanding of the common good

What do you see within yourself?

- The gifts God has given me
- The call to see and make space for the gifts of others
- My own wrestling with what the common good is
- My own wrestling with the purpose of the church today

What is the context – textual and historical?

- Written by Paul
- Amid a letter that is addressing concerns raised by and within a particular community
- Counsel grounded in faith convictions (1:4-9)
 - Grace of God in Christ
 - Christ's witness is among them
 - They are filled with spiritual gifts
 - They are waiting for Jesus
 - Christ will strengthen
 - God is faithful
 - They are called into fellowship with Christ
- Follows address about divisions and abuses at the Lord's Supper
- Precedes metaphor of the body
- Precedes exposition on love

What questions does this text raise for you?

- When is it okay to not be unified because the differences are (righteously) egregious?
- How do I know what my gifts are?
- Are spiritual gifts a “given,” or do they change over time?
 - Are they ever circumstantial?
- How are spiritual gifts connected to spiritual practices?
- What about undiscerned gifts or unused gifts?
- What is the common good?
 - Is it universal or particular or both?
- Why do some gifts seem to get celebrated more than others?

What words/themes seem of particular import?

- Spiritual gifts
- Holy Spirit
- Varieties
- Same
- Manifestation of the Spirit
- Common good
- Spirit activates
- Spirit chooses

What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?

- God gifts for the common good
- Spirit’s gifts are diverse
- Spirit energizes
- The Spirit’s will is at work
- Each person is uniquely called and gifted
- Unity is in Christ alone

What is the as-over-againstness of this text?

- Divisions are real and often fraught
- Some differences are actually destructive
- Unity at all costs isn’t about Jesus
- It is hard to honor all giftedness
- Some gifts scare us
- Gifts can be misused
- We don’t agree on the common good
- Gifts can be corrupted and become self-serving

Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?

- Jesus is same Lord of all gifts given by the Spirit and activated by God
- God is one who gifts for the common good
- God’s Spirit is manifest in gifts
- God’s Spirit works through people for the common good
- God is Trinitarian
 - Spirit, Lord, God
- God chooses what gifts to give when

What have others said about this text?

- [“In the midst of divisions](#), especially denominationally in my own church (ELCA), how do we talk about Christian unity? What happens when a community’s identity resides in a uniformity of commitments and not in the unity that God in Christ makes possible? Will the church be a place of building up and not tearing down, where we do not have to prescribe a paradigm of winners and losers, where we actually imagine and believe that Christ is truly present and listens in on our conversations? What would Jesus hear?” [Karoline Lewis](#), Professor and the Marbury E. Anderson Chair of Biblical Preaching, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota
- [“Seeking to bridge the widening gap of division](#) that threatened to destroy the young Corinthian church, as well as to address other matters, the Apostle Paul wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians during his three year stay in Ephesus. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Paul struggled to teach the oftentimes carnal Corinthians, who had formerly been pagan worshippers, the difference between worshipping the true and living God in contrast to their worship of “idols” [vs.2]. Because the Corinthian church, as did others, often attributed different “gifts” to more than one god, such as Diana the goddess of fertility, Aphrodite the goddess of love and Apollo the sun god, Paul begins verse 4 informing the church that there is but one God and through this God all spiritual gifts function. The Greek word for spiritual gifts is plural (*pneumatika*) meaning things pertaining to the Holy Spirit.” Janet Floyd, Esq., New Beginnings Worship Center, Monroe, LA
- [“In the midst of a listing](#) of various decision-making modalities (gifts) there is a key element that takes us beyond simply discussing, debating, warring about the numbered hierarchy of gifts that ranks those who hold them. This key is that of “a common good”. In this sense all gifts are good gifts if they are able to play their part. When there is no dialogue between them, the gifts fall apart into sectarian prejudices.” Wesley White, Kairos CoMotion Lectionary Dialogue

What will I teach or proclaim?

- God gifts for service
- Unity is in Christ alone
- Gifted for a purpose
- Gifts serve the common good
- Unity is manifested in diversity of gifts
- Gifts are more than “just talents”: they are manifestations of the Spirit of the Living God
- Gifts come from the Spirit
- The variety of gifts is God-given
- No gift is better than another
 - They all are God-given
 - They all are signs of God at work
 - They all serve the common good