



10/08/2023 Common Good 1 Corinthians 12:4-13

Fall is all about football! I love to watch football! I enjoy watching the Vikings work together from a common goal, what the whole team wants...to win. We pulled out a win last week, not quite owning our destiny but we'll take it. Keep winning Vikings.

It's fascinating to notice when the coaches re-arrange the athletes, to test abilities and confirm strengths, to witness how everyone is involved and giving it their best effort.

There is such obvious unity and much diversity. Fun to watch the different athletes use their different gifts. Those sad moments when a player tries to be what they are not. Like when a quarterback tries to block downfield. They just can't. They try. They get creamed.

And the jumbotron is no respecter of persons, replaying the quarterback getting creamed, over and over. Just confirming there are all sorts of gifts on a team, no one player has all of them.

Exciting to watch individuals and teams get better week after week, make mistakes we wish they wouldn't like Mattison fumbling. Or when Cousins threw another interception last week. But then the team pulls together, encourages one another to shake it off, try again, being a safe place to learn and grow.

No surprise to you, that I have lots of enthusiasm and plenty of opinions. I know I am just an armchair quarterback, not an expert.

But I think you would agree with this particular premise, whether you like football or not. No coach, no team owner, or armchair quarterback would expect the Vikings or any team to win, no matter how much talent they have, IF only say 70 or 80 percent of the team is not in the game?

Scoff...a team would never let that happen. The Vikings would never let only five or six players to trot out on to the field. And try to play that way?

That would be so weird.

Nobody would do that.

Right?

So then, what do we do with these Barna statistics from around 2001? Of the Christians they poled, only 68% had even heard of spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts...abilities given to Christian believers for the building up of the whole body of Christ. They are not given for personal gain, but for ministry in the church and world. And for the COMMON GOOD. Only 68% had heard about spiritual gifts.

And less than 10 to 15% of those questioned knew their spiritual gifts and were using them for the common good of their church.

Up to 85 to 90% of most Christians in an average congregation don't know what their spiritual gifts are? No church can win, or be effective with those numbers.

I think we are probably doing better than the average church. Cuz I grew up on Garrison Keillor's Prairie Home Companion, his quote about Lake Wobegon...**where the men are good looking and all the children are above average!**

We are above average! We are!

And yet, safe bet, we have room to grow in knowing the spiritual gifts God has given us and finding intentional and specific ways to use them here.

After all, from today's first verse, "**Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.**" God wants all his children to know their spiritual gifts and use them to bless the church. God wants us out on the field, playing, going "All In!" and having fun, living with such joy and satisfying purpose.

Could you image what it would be like around here if we were more like 70 or 80% using our spiritual gifts? It would be like a holy circus! Think of the energy, everyone pulling together, people growing spiritually, the excitement of trusting the Lord to lead and guide us into new ministry efforts. It would be electrifying, and messy, and maybe noisy, and fun!

And God would be so overjoyed!

And the world would notice and wonder and desire our joy around spiritual gifts.

You've know this joy. You can relate to the joy you have had in watching your child or grandchild open their birthday gifts; open what you bought and so carefully wrapped for them at Christmas!

Our Heavenly Father, his eyes just sparkle as he holds his breath in giddy anticipation, watching us pull a gift God has given us into our lap to unwrap.

God's smile grows and grows as we unwrap it and maybe even ask, "**Wow...huh, okay? Can you show me IF this is true, and show me how to use this thing?**"

It's God's job to give the spiritual gifts and it's our job to open and test drive them.

I'll be a little transparent, share about learning about one of my spiritual gifts. Yep. I've taken quite a few assessments and then tried a variety of different volunteer positions in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and at Church of the Open Door. It's been a little messy. But also fun. Looking for fruit, for affirmation and confirmation from others.

So, here's one gift I have, the spiritual gift of discernment. Which is the God-given ability to detect whether the actions or intentions of others are from a heavenly, earthly or demonic influence.

Reviewing the section on discernment from this book.. (hold up my copy) Spiritual Gifts by Bryan Carraway.

Bryan said those with this gift can sense underneath the facade of normalcy when there is demonic influence. People may need intercession or deliverance. Or whether a speaker, teacher or pastor, an author or a music artist is working from God's influence or a different source.

They can tell when someone is struggling with grief or great sadness or resisting God's work in their life. Or sense and discern good or bad spirits in a geographic location.

After reviewing that description, I realized I have multiple stories under each of those descriptive phrases. I've lived long enough now.

One time my roommate and I were out delivering the weekly paper in November. It was snowing heavy and the sun was setting. We had one last paper to deliver way out in the boonies. We saved it for the end of the day. Came to this compound area, chain link fence, no lights, a bit odd but we just kept chatting and looking for the mailbox to stuff the paper in.

When all of a sudden, I was hit by this huge sense of EVIL and immediate discernment to leave now! I sucked in this huge breath and I exploded with, "Get us out of here, right now! Get us out of here!"

When I looked over at Janice, she blanched, cuz I am sure all the blood had drained from my face. And to her credit, she didn't ask any questions. Just slammed the car into reverse and we high tailed it out of there!

Thankfully, I haven't had an experience that powerful since. One is plenty!

Another time, I was riding in the passenger seat with my co-worker Patty. We were at a conference together in Albuquerque, New Mexico, driving around in our rental car after the last evening session had concluded.

We were chatting a little, driving here and there, sight-seeing. We had just come around a corner. When all of a sudden, I was completely enveloped in peace and gentleness and joy. It just washed over me, like I was under a waterfall. It was amazing!

I tried to explain it to Patty, not sure she totally understood what was happening. But I didn't understand it either. Thankful she didn't argue when I kept saying..."Take a right, now take a left, and stay on this road."

And eventually, we came to the front door of "one of the most popular spirituality authors and speakers in the world, Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, and his...

...Center of Action of Contemplation. A person I had never heard about and a place I had never been to before. Pretty wild!

Sometimes, I think God gives me those kinds of experiences to remind me this thing we are doing, serving God, following Jesus, worshipping, helping others come to know Jesus, is not a

completely earthly thing. God's Kingdom is primarily spiritual, it is a spiritual journey God has us on. And we often barely acknowledge that.

And sometimes we get going on auto pilot a little, and we miss out on some exciting things, actual joy, and fun that God has for us in using our spiritual gifts to bless others, on our spiritual journeys, building a spiritual Kingdom.

It is the same God who not only gives different gifts but "activates" them in us whenever it pleases God...like when Janice and I were on our paper route or when Patty and I were driving around Arizona for the first time. Wake us up to this powerful spiritual journey we are on!

Everyone has not only a spiritual gift or two but also skills, talents and passions and all of those are gifts from God too. We may not even recognize we are using a spiritual gift. But no matter, the Spirit works in and around and through all of them for the common good in a church. It's beautiful when we give God access to our hearts and invite God to use us in serving others.

Sometimes we may feel that certain people are more spiritually gifted than others or that there is one right way of serving the church and the world. We may be afraid to be vulnerable, fear rejection, or fear we are not good enough.

But as 1 Cor. 12:12-13 illustrates, **"Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body."** We are many parts, but one body. We are all gifted, many gifts but one body, one church.

Each gift is equally necessary to the church's functioning and its mission in the world. It is the same Spirit who gives these gifts to each of us and unites us together. Through the power of the Spirit at work in our baptisms, from verse 13.

Think about your own spiritual gifts, to become curious and intrigued with how God has gifted you. Maybe you know your gifts and are using them, great! Maybe you just need to dust them off a bit and begin using them again. Or maybe you could help others learn about their spiritual gifts.

But maybe you are like the other 80% of Christians that don't know your gifts and need to take another step. I encourage you to take a simple 20 minute step, like taking a spiritual gifts inventory. **(hold up my copies)** I have printed off 10 copies of the United Methodist spiritual gifts inventory to give away after church. It's a place to start.

We have a link to this spiritual gifts inventory on our website. And we will be putting a link in the Connections. Or I can print you off a paper copy of the inventory. Or talk to friends or your spouse, they probably can guess your spiritual gifts. I'd love to have a chat to help you discern.

So, I encourage you to be the best team player you can be on Team BUMC! Be “All In!” here in our church. We are one body, one team, Team Jesus!

Imagine the energy of being on a full team, a winning team. Imagine the blessings that would be released here, how lives would be touched and people would be transformed, be healed and grow!

Go “All In!” and don’t leave your spiritual gifts unwrapped and unused.

As we move into a time of reflection... Turn to the Lord in prayer, ask the Holy Spirit for help. Do you know your spiritual gifts? Are you using them for the common good? What step is God asking of you in the near future?