

“As the Spirit Gives Them”

Judges 16:15-22; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Today's meditation is a continuation of a series about things learned about the Church over the years. Last week some ideas were offered on fallibility, whereas this meditation focuses on ability. And we all have ability for the work of the Church, wherever that church may be found. That is, as the New Testament lesson for today notes:

Each one of us is given a gift to be used.

Everybody, has an important part, as allowed or assigned by the Holy Spirit. Each person that is baptized is called to a particular part of the overall work of the Church, and that calling is not from a menu of options, but an intentional action and call of the Holy Spirit. All are blessed, in one way or another. And as the text will continue, some are not more blessed than others.

The key then, is to discern what that gift is, if not already discovered and used “for the common good” of the life of the community of faith. Each person is given a gift, and it is more than to simply know which is the business end of a pair of channel locks.

(And it should be clearly noted that the notion of gift is not some money pitch here. Not everything is about money. The text does not mention money...the apostle will give a stewardship appeal in another place, but that is another issue, and there will be time for that).

Yet back to the text before us. And consider that if everyone has received some kind of different gift to use “for the common good,” there is the strong implication from the apostle's words that no one has every gift. **Again, no one person has all the gifts for serving Jesus Christ and His people.** And it is intentional that way. The Holy Spirit, according to the apostle does not endow some people with all the gifts, like some 5-Star recruit for a college football program. No one, even the pastor, has all the all the gifts for the common good of the life of the vital congregation. Indeed in other places in the words of St. Paul, the leaders of the church have different functions. No one is called to do everything, but every one is called to do a particular thing or serve an important role. The strength in the gathered community of faith is not in one person of influence, but in the joint ministry of many. That is, at least, an axiom of what it means to act as a true Presbyterian.

All the gifts working together make the Church strong.

Indeed, differences in gifts and talents (for that matter), are not simply a rolling of the dice or results of some kind of jumbling of the gene pool, but the intentional plan of the Holy Spirit, literally to the advantage of the recipient.

And it should be noted that for our church purposes, it is the diverse churches in our denomination that are growing. Hence, the embrace of diversity, which works “for the common good.”

But this part of the letter is not just filling space, as some interesting idea to consider.

Why did St. Paul need to explain this to those congregations at Corinth? Knowing that his letters usually were being sent to address some kind of need or controversy, something must have been happening at that community of faith for him to go on about this.

One can read the rest of the letter and yes there are his instructions and warnings about mishandling the Lord's Supper, sexual shenanigans that were taking place, as well as the insensitivity to those who were recent converts from the surrounding pagan religions, but why this topic? For that matter why is this theme of the variety of gifts a topic that he will feel the need to come back to several times in his other correspondence?

Could it be that people don't use their abilities for the church? They don't think that they are needed? Or won't make a difference?

Nonsense, the apostle is saying. Everyone has an assignment. No one is not needed. If you are on the team, even the players on the bench are essential. They have role as well. (Softball cheers/ stealing signs)

More than that, if the use of one's gift that has been given by the Spirit only makes the community of faith stronger, certainly holding back makes the church weaker.

Indeed, holding back is not a neutral position. Not being involved is actually being involved ... to the detriment of the community of faith. And if one has not identified just how the Holy Spirit has called them, those who know you well can tell you, and usually more accurately than you can see for yourself. Of course this does place responsibility on the leadership of the church, which is to be intentional in finding the gifts of the people of God and helping them discover their ministry, and then challenge them to use it.

Maybe not employing one's gift of the Holy Spirit, as identified by the apostle is like driving a car with a misfiring cylinder. There was a time when most automobiles had 8 cylinders, or at least 6. But less so these days. Not as much room for error. If one cylinder of the four goes bad, the car runs dangerously rough. Try to climb a long hill with your engine sputtering and coughing.

I doubt that the apostle had any kind of vision for the future of transportation, but the idea is there. For the future of this congregation, and any fellowship for that matter, there is little room for error. A checkup to work for the common good is always appropriate and vital. As the world becomes more and more divisive, the church, running on all cylinders, must be be at work, using the gifts that have been assigned to it, whether you are 8 or 80.

Work to make sure that all the cylinders are in play, for the journey ahead will need it.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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