

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

Dear friends in Christ and fellow redeemed:

In a recent reading from his letter to the Romans, St. Paul reminded us: *“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”* (Romans 12:6, ESV) In His love and mercy for His Church and His people, God has blessed us with His Holy Spirit. It is by the Spirit that we come to know our sinfulness, but it is also through the Spirit that we come to know the great love of God for us, made known in the redeeming, forgiveness-bestowing sacrifice of the Eternal Son and True Man, Jesus Christ. It is also through the Spirit that God equips and blesses His church with those special gifts that Paul properly calls in our text today *spiritual gifts*.

Over the next few weeks we want to look at these gifts that the Spirit bestows on His church. All Christians have been blessed by God with a certain gift, or several gifts. Yet we often do not use our gifts. Perhaps that is because we are unaware of our particular gift. Perhaps we are afraid. Maybe we even think that our gift isn't as important as that of someone else, and we downplay what God is doing in us. That is why we want to look at the gifts, that we may see that God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. More importantly, God calls us together to use our gifts for our mutual growth and blessing. As our text today says: *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* The key is that these gifts are given for the common good and for building up the Kingdom of God.

When many people think of spiritual gifts, they fall into the trap of thinking that the best gift is the ability to speak in tongues. That, my dear people loved by God, is a topic in itself, and we have actually discussed it in sermons in the past. Paul speaks of higher gifts than speaking in tongues. There is no single chapter of the bible that gives a complete listing of all spiritual gifts in alphabetical order, or in order of importance, or in the order of those gifts which are most frequently bestowed. Some sections, like Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12 list a half dozen or more—but other aptitudes which are called spiritual gifts of God are scattered throughout various portions of the Bible. It is possible to identify about 30 such gifts, and since we don't have time to look at each gift individually, we will group them together. Before we do that, we will look at the way in which God brings those gifts together in His Church.

In our text today, Paul says: *“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”* The chapter from which our text is taken goes on to talk about the body and how it works together, and also the importance of even the smallest parts of the body. Paul declares through the Holy Spirit: *“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.”* (1 Corinthians 12:18, ESV) He also assures us: *“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”* (1 Corinthians 12:27, ESV)

The body is a good illustration of the gifts, but I'm not a doctor, so I thought I would use a different way of looking at them, based on something near and dear to me—another of God's great gifts, the gift of music.

Music has always been one of my great loves. I could do without the television, but take away music, and I would feel very empty. When I was in high school most of my activities and my social life revolved around music. I was once involved in a concert band, a symphony orchestra, a brass quintet, a stage band, a church band and an oom-pah band all at one time. It was fun and exciting to see the many different instruments and the many different musicians all working together to produce beautiful music, and I was so glad to be a part of it. Sadly, I don't play much anymore. Oh, I still have the ability to play, but it just isn't the same. One reason is that I cannot, by myself, produce the beautiful harmonies and melodies of a full band or

orchestra. By myself, I can play only one simple part of a song at a time. Without the help and support of other people and other instruments, the music is still there, but it lacks something. It's just not the same.

This is also true when we start to look at the church. It takes many different people, each one playing his or her part, to make it possible for the church to make beautiful music that encourages and inspires people. Without them the church still goes on, but somehow it is different; less than it could be. That is precisely what Paul is telling us in our text today. Again, whether we join Paul in speaking of the church as a body, with each member being an important and necessary part of that body or we compare the church to a symphony orchestra, the point is still the same: it takes many different parts to help us be all that we can be as a church. God has given us a place in His body, the church. He has given us a part to play in the orchestra that is the church. When each member is playing his part, then we truly begin to make beautiful music together, music that gives God glory; music that is a joy to people inside and outside of the church.

There are two basic things necessary for a good orchestra: musicians who play the music as it is written, and a conductor who can lead and direct them to do their best. In the church, we are the musicians, and God is the conductor. And what a conductor we have! I have played for a variety of different conductors, both good and bad. My high school music teacher was the best of them all. He taught me things about music and about my instrument that helped me become a better player. He was tough and demanding, but also helpful and encouraging. He cared about the members of our band, not just as musicians, but as people, and as a result, he brought out the best in us, and we were willing to work extra hard for him. On the other hand, I have also played for a rather well known conductor of a major symphony. I found him to be uncaring, unfeeling, impatient, and moody. He demanded respect, but did not show respect for others. I did not play for him very long, because I found I did not play as well under his leadership.

As a church, we have an excellent conductor, one who truly cares about us. He cares about everything that affects our lives and He wants us to make truly beautiful music together. He knows the noise and discord that exists in our world and how our lives are out of tune because of sin. That is why Jesus Christ, the true God, takes on our human flesh and blood and gives His holy, sinless life as a sacrifice for us on the cross. He rises from the dead to lead us in a life of harmony with God. As our conductor, as our leader, He can teach, encourage, motivate and lead us to work together, to be the best we can be. But more than that, He actually provides us with the talents we need to play our part in His orchestra. This is what sets Him apart from all other conductors. He doesn't simply choose the best people for His orchestra. He makes it possible for us to be a valuable part of His orchestra. That is why Paul says: ***"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues."*** (1 Corinthians 12:7-10, ESV) Paul goes on to make it clear: ***"All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."*** (1 Corinthians 12:11, ESV)

If the church truly were an orchestra we would say that God gives some the ability to play the trumpet, some the ability to play the trombone, some the ability to play the flute, the violin or the clarinet. He has not made us all the same. He has blessed us with unique and special gifts that can be blended together in perfect harmony. Under His leadership and guidance we bring all our different talents and abilities together in beautiful harmony, producing some very wonderful results.

But what kind of music will an orchestra produce when only half of the musicians are playing their parts? Would Beethoven symphonies sound as beautiful if only the violin and the saxophone were playing? Would the Beach Boys be as entertaining without the guitars and drums? No, each part is important if the music is going to be all that it can be. That is true for us, too. Each one of you, as part of our church is important if we are going to be at our best. It doesn't matter how small that part may be, it is still important. At an orchestra rehearsal, the piccolo player thought that everyone else was making so much noise that no one would ever notice that he wasn't playing. But it only took a moment for the conductor to stop the piece and ask, "where is the piccolo?" Even though it was just a small part by a small instrument, the maestro knew the whole piece was affected when it was not played. Yet how often have we, as a church, had to learn to get by without far more important parts. There may be times when you think that you have such a small and insignificant part to play in the church, that you will not be missed. But the truth is, your part will be missed. It will affect, in some way, shape or form the things that we do together. The music may be there, but it will be different. It will be less than it could be. We are all important to this orchestra we call a church, because we are at our best, and the music is the most beautiful, when we are all making that music together.

Today we install our Parish Planning Council, Elders and those who serve in leadership roles in our church. We still have vacancies on our board, including the need for congregational president. We are blessed through these people, but they can't

do everything themselves. The work of the church is greater than any number of professional staff members can do. I know of no person who has all the talents and abilities to do it all themselves. But when all the members of the church, who all have been blessed with the different talents and abilities that come to us through the power of the Holy Spirit are using those gifts in the church, then we will truly make beautiful music together; music that encourages and inspires us as members of the church, and which can touch and affect the lives of those who are still outside the church.

The hymn writer says: *“Come, Thou Fount of ev’ry blessing, Tune my heart to sing Thy grace.”* (LSB 686, st. 1) The Saviour who gave His life for us on the cross has taken away the sinful, discordant noise of our lives. He rose again and lives to bless His people in His Church, sending His Spirit to put a glorious song into our hearts, as the Spirit equips us to live a life of joyful thanksgiving for all He has done for us. When we come together as His people in His church, each playing His part, that music is something wonderful. God grant that we make that music together, as a beautiful symphony of praise to our God. Amen.