

Call to Worship

God is the giver of all good and perfect gifts. These gifts are offered to make us one with God and one with each other. **Let us adhere to the Holy Spirit's claim on our lives, as we reach out together in love, building up the body of Christ. We come now to surrender our lives to God, realizing the value and uniqueness of who we can become when we are bound together.**

Prayer of Invocation

Always Present God, the wind of your Spirit blows through our lives, guiding, protecting and prodding us as with an unseen hand. Help us to be aware of your active, caring presence moving within, around and among us, in this community of worship, in our daily living, and in the world. Teach us to be calm in our souls but quick to discern and follow the indications that move us in the direction of your perfect will for our lives. Amen

The Word

1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 13-21

There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries and the same Lord; and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. **A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink.**

Certainly, the body isn't one part but many. If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? **If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell?**

But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? **But as it is, there are many parts but one body. So the eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you," or in turn, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."**

Living the Word

After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended back into heaven; after that the Holy Spirit arrived, to work with the new Christians who were still trying to wrap their minds around a new way of thinking; after the Apostle Paul had quit leading the persecution of the new Christians and became himself, a Christian; that is when the real work of 'being' a Christian began.

Paul traveled from community to community telling the Good News of God's love, now known in new ways through Jesus Christ. People responded; and new churches began and grew. They were probably house churches – most likely 'underground' churches, that had to stay hidden from the persecution of the Jews who hadn't experienced the Holy Spirit as Paul had. Paul lived in their communities for a while, he worked along-side them and as they had with, Jesus they came and gathered to hear what Paul had to say.

After a while, Paul would move on to another community and begin again. Because he was traveling far on foot or by sea, he couldn't go back and check on the churches that he had been to, very often, but he wrote to them. His letters don't wander. Each letter is concise and gives us a bit of the picture of the community he is addressing. At the same time the letters are almost all that we have preserved of Paul's ministry, yet they tell a story that still connects with us today.

Today's letter begins like this: "From Paul, called by God's will to be an apostle of Jesus Christ... To God's church that is in Corinth: To those who have been made holy to God in Christ Jesus, who are called to be God's people.

Together with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place—he's their Lord and ours! Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:1-3)

Paul goes on to thank the Christian community for their faithfulness. And then he gets to one of the main reasons for the letter. *"Now I encourage you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Agree with each other and don't be divided into rival groups. Instead, be restored with the same mind and the same purpose. My brothers and sisters, Chloe's people gave me some information about you, that you're fighting with each other."* (1 Corinthians 1:10-12) Hard to believe, I know that there were Christians disagreeing in the first churches!

This first letter to the people of Corinth goes on to once again define what it means to be a follower of Christ. Today's scripture reading is about what a community of faith can be if they recognize that God created all of us with differing gifts, but not randomly. There is a design and a purpose to God's plan and when we follow Jesus, the plan becomes clearer with the help of Paul, the Bible and all that we have to keep reminding us as we lose our way.

This passage is a familiar one, but we can get entangled in the eyes and hands and ears and feet, then miss some of the other points. So we begin with verse 4: *"There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit."* So, all of our differing gifts come from God's Holy Spirit. They have been chosen for us in differing combinations and patterns to fit according to God's plan.

"A demonstration (or expression) of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good." So the Holy Spirit can be expressed or demonstrated through us for the good of the whole community. God values all people and has given gifts to all people. Do you know about your spiritual gifts? If not, I invite you to explore tools for identifying your spiritual gifts. I can make some of them available if you ask.

"We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body... and we all were given one Spirit to drink." Hear that, not just 'one gift, but all from the same Spirit. How would our congregation change if everyone actively shared their spiritual gifts? What could we be doing with the known gifts within our congregation?

"and there are different ministries and the same Lord;" We know that because we have easily identified four ministries right here at Hayward United Methodist Church: Caring, Education, Worship and Missions. Yet we know there is only one Lord. *"and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone."* God the producer; God the Creator. Did you

hear it? The scripture is saying that God is not a 'one trick pony.' "*God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like God wanted.*"

Paul did indeed become the feet as he traveled to share Jesus message far and wide. Jesus' friends Mary and Martha had differing gifts as Martha was more the hands and Mary was more the ear. Does anyone remember the photographer Ansel Adams? He had the eye of God and shared God through his black and white nature pictures. Think of the things you love to do most...What part of the body would people say you are?

God's unconditional love can bind all of our parts, our differing gifts into one, binding us together and making us whole. When we grow in faith together, not without some misunderstandings, but because we accept that we are all different and need to function differently, we become a stronger community of faith.

When we stand by the faithful because we know that even though they are different, they are of the same God and trying like us to follow the same Jesus, we lift them up and are also lifted in the process.

What are Spiritual Gifts? 1 Peter 4:10 says: "*...serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God's diverse gifts.*" Each of us has received gifts from God and God expects us to exercise good stewardship in the use of these gifts. But what exactly are these gifts God gives? Twenty different gifts are identified in Paul's letter to the churches in Rome (Romans 12), Corinth (I Corinthians 12) , and Ephesus (Ephesians 4).

These gifts cover the broadest spectrum of outreach, witness, nurture and service. Gifts of apostleship, evangelism, prophesy, leadership, compassion, servant hood, and the speaking and interpreting other tongues; these gifts move us into the world to share God's love. Gifts of knowledge, teaching, discernment, wisdom and helping, enable us to strengthen faith and build community.

Gifts such as administration, giving, healing, miracles, shepherding, exhortation, and faith, ground us and empower us to serve needs within our community of faith and beyond. Paul's listing of gifts may not be exhaustive, but they illustrate the work of God's Spirit in our lives to equip and enable us to do God's work. Paul also offers some important insights into the nature of God given gifts.

Spiritual gifts are given to each person in unique combinations. Some people live from a specific set of gifts for a lifetime, while others see new gifts emerge and other gifts recede. It is the responsibility of each person to discern and strengthen her or his gifts for ministry. The ideal place to do this is in Christian community.

Although our gifts are given to individuals, they are given for the common good, to build up the body of Christ. The gifts God gives are synergistic – combined they are greater than the sum of their parts. Individually we can do many good things, but in combination with other gifted people, we can do great things; and by the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit, we can even do miracles.

God gives gifts to us to bring us to unity, to knit us together in a spiritual community as the body of Christ. The human body is an amazing metaphor. Each gifted part functions best serving its unique purpose in a mystical communion with every other gifted part. All are equally necessary and valuable.

Another metaphor might be that of a computer. One person might be a processor, another a monitor, another an operating system, yet another a keyboard, a mouse, or a software program. Each has value in itself, but the only way that any part can fulfill its potential is working together in the larger system.

As we grow in our giftedness and learn together how to use our gifts more and more effectively and faithfully, an amazing thing happens: we begin to bear fruit! And not just any fruit, but the fruit of the Spirit. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul describes the outward and visible evidence that we are living fully in God's Spirit.

We will be known by the fruit that we produce. All who witness our living in the world will know us because we will generate and spread love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Note that these are not fruits (plural), but all aspects of the Holy Spirit that saturate and permeate all we say and do.

Living our gifts faithfully in the world is a catalyst for radical transformation. Together, bound by God's Spirit to be the living body of Christ for the world, we will produce more love and joy and peace and all of the fruits of the Spirit. We will become who God intended us to be all along!

In John's gospel, when Jesus is preparing to leave his disciples to carry on the work he began, he reminds them, *"You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you."* (15:16)

As we grow and mature in our discipleship, we know that God's Spirit is within us, guiding us, strengthening us, and empowering us so that we might produce lasting fruit. And the things that we will ask in God's name are not selfish or personal things, but as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, ours will be a humble prayer, *"not our will be done, but yours O Lord."*

Love and joy, peace and kindness are more than nice descriptive nouns. They become for us verbs, actions terms that we do because of who we are. We are patient in times of unrest and turmoil. We are self-controlled and faith-filled, even in the most challenging times. We are generous to all in need, gentle with those who are hurting and afraid, loving the unloved and making peace wherever we go.

We all have been gifted. But this is only the beginning. We are gifted so that we might be joined as the body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to produce fruit, and sent forth to transform the world. Thanks be to God.

Tomorrow we will mail out this year's commitment cards to our members and friends. Three weeks from today on November 8, we will celebrate our commitments in worship. It will be a bringing together of all of our gifts as we look to the future of our congregation as a faith filled community ready to give of ourselves to grow God's Kingdom here on earth.

The card says this: "With a grateful heart for God's boundless generosity and as an expression of my Christian stewardship, I make this commitment to Christ's church and the ministry of this congregation."

As you ponder your commitment, pray for the sharing of all of our gifts; be present to combine and use your gifts with others; identify and offer the gifts that you have been blessed with; find ways to be in service to help the church function; and share the good news of what we can do here, with the people outside these doors as a witness of Jesus Christ.

If you have questions or confusion, I invite you to talk to God first and then please ask the Finance Team or staff; we are here to answer. It is better to ask a silly question, than to not ask at all...During any given week, I answer just about every kind of question you could imagine and some you might never imagine...I know I give the best answers when I turn to the Holy Spirit for the words, rather than just trusting my own.

Ask God to show you something new, a gift you have been given that you may have missed...Commit to a way to transform the world through your gifts combined with the whole church of people who you've sat next to and the people who have sat in front of you. We are the body of Christ and we are in this together, created by God, taught by Jesus and lead by the Holy Spirit.

PRAY