

Good morning. This is the second week of Epiphany and today I want to explore more with you the joy of discovery. This season between Christmas and Lent is where we pray for God to open our eyes to see how God is being revealed in the world then – as in the years of Christ – and now.

It begins with the Magi visiting Jesus and how God was revealed to these gentile strangers who were not part of the Abrahamic family. These gentiles, though, were drawn into the ongoing drama of the Bible anyway, fulfilling God's promise to the descendants of Abraham that "through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:3)

All our scripture today directs us, God's people, towards "being known and loved and honored." In each passage, scripture speaks of gifts given to the people of God. Our text from first Corinthians 12 is no different. In this chapter, the people of God are a body together – with Christ as the head. Christ is, thus, made manifest in the body. We see God being revealed IN THE BODY when the body works together in unity and treasuring/honoring all the gifts each part is given.

No one's gift is better than another's, wrote Paul, something those folks really needed to hear. He wrote, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of ministries, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

In 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, we read that the variety of gifts is wonderful: Eugene Peterson, in the Message, interprets these gifts as: wise counsel, clear understanding, simple faith, healing, miraculous acts, proclamation, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts are activated by one and the same Spirit, who hands out each one as it chooses. And each one of these gifts is for the good of all.

With the focus on how God is manifesting among us then our focus becomes less on ourselves and picking on the differences between us. It becomes easier with practice.

We could say, focusing on witnessing God in our midst is a spiritual discipline – what will strengthen our spirituality will also improve our relationships within the congregation AND our neighbors. This is, indeed, a reason to rejoice.

But before I go on, let me pause and remind you of how things interconnect. The abilities that God provides to each of us, the gifts that God bestows, are not disconnected from each other, they don't each exist as if in a vacuum apart from one another.

There's a lot that we can learn about our gifts and our interconnectedness through this text in 1 Corinthians – but it's hard to understand everything that Paul is suggesting to the Corinthians without doing Hermeneutics – more specifically – delving deep into the words he writes and uses to illustrate his point.

Let's look at how certain words inter-connect.

You see how I've added the Greek. I think a little hermeneutic research into the text's original language is always a nifty way of figuring out what the text is saying.

There are varieties of gifts (χαρίσματα) (charismata),
but the same Spirit (πνεύμα) (pneuma).

There are varieties of ministries (διακονία) (diakonia),
but the same Lord (κύριος) (Kyrios).

There are varieties of activities (ἐνεργημάτων)
(energematon),

but the same God (θεός) (Theos),
activating (ἐνεργῶν) (energon) all in all.

"There are varieties of gifts," Paul wrote. The Greek word for "gift" here is "charisma."

Χάρισμα = Charisma = gift given, gift

Charismata = gifts

It is important, in understanding Paul's message to the congregation in Corinth, to look deeply at the words he uses. To ignore the root of the word used for gifts, in this case, word would take away from the meaning of gifts.

Gifts has a special root word – *Chara*, which means joy... or more specifically rejoicefulness.

The verb of *Chara* is *Chairo*, "to rejoice."

Charisma	- gift
Charismata	- gifts
Chara	- joy/rejoicefulness
Chairo	- to rejoice

Rejoice and be glad. Rejoice always. A fruit of the spirit is Rejoicefulness. Seeking out our God – given – gifts together requires a lightness of spirit, not a heaviness of heart; it means gratitude, not grumbling.

In a similar vein, from the root word, *Chara*, we also hear echoes of grace. *Charis* is the Greek word for grace.

Charisma	- gift
Charismata	- gifts
Chara	- joy
Chairo	- to rejoice
Charis	- grace

And here, by grace, I mean “loving kindness, good will, charity and favor.” God loves us just as we are; completely, utterly, ugly bits and all. It’s not anything we do that causes God to love us. Nor does God love us any less for our failures along the way.

Romans 5:8 tells us that God proves this love for us that while we were still sinners, lost, Christ died FOR US. God reached out and forgave us, welcomed us, found us...God always thinks the best of us. This is *Charis* – grace. And the word for spiritual gift – charisma – stems from this grace.

Here's another wonderful connection: When we come together to celebrate communion – we celebrate the sacred rite of the *eucharist*.

Charisma	- gift
Charismata	- gifts
Chara	- joy/rejoicefulness
Chairo	- to rejoice
Charis	- grace
Eucharist	- to give thanks, gratitude, being thankful

Eucharistesas, in Greek, is the word used for what Jesus did in the upper room when he broke and blessed the bread and cup with his disciples. He *gave thanks* to God. When we celebrate the eucharist, we celebrate with Christ - giving thanks ... gratitude ... being thankful with joy and grace and love.

Paul wrote, "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7) It’s appropriate to connect this "common good" of discerning and learning how to use our God-given abilities with the communion that we share together with Jesus.

God’s spiritual gifts are not given from malice, irritation, or with any expectation other than for us to use these gifts with love for the benefit of the congregation and community. These gifts are to be used to point others towards the nature of God – which is love.

So, let me remind you of the gifts Paul names in 1 Corinthians 12. These are: wise counsel, clear understanding, simple faith, healing, miraculous acts, proclamation, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues.

Together we are God's gift – to each other and to the world – not in an entitled way, but in a way that shines the love of God so that others are drawn to the light.

And woven through all these gifts – those named today and those not yet named but witnessed is our common walk with Christ and each other. And we best shine our gifts when we use them as they are meant to be; full of a deep-seated sense of joy that can't be taken away from us, an unmerited grace that helps us to live lightly within ourselves and towards each other, a sense that it all is a gift from God (not something we have to earn), which fills us with gratitude, and rejoicing as we go."

Joy
Grace
Gift
Gratitude
Rejoicing

During Epiphany we are challenged to wonder and be in awe at the magnitude and infinite within the finite; to wonder anew at how God is being revealed in the world around us. We are challenged to aim our God-given energies outward, to follow Jesus where he leads.

Friends, God isn't only in the sky – as we look at with amazing wonder at the heavens. Nor is God only in a tiny baby who would become our savior, teacher and hope. God is working within us. We need to look inward and behold how God is being revealed in us. Can we look within ourselves and within our neighbors with the same wonder?