

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
January 20, 2019  
Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer  
***We're different in the same way***

—1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Is Emmanuel Lutheran Church a gifted congregation? If you say no to that—“No, I wouldn't say it's gifted”—what makes you say that? If you say yes to that—“Yes, I think Emmanuel is a gifted congregation”—what makes you say that? In what ways do you notice that this is a gifted congregation? Furthermore, if you say it's a gifted congregation, how do you think the congregation does in using the gifts that are here? We can also make this matter of being gifted personal. Are you a gifted person? If you say no—“No, I wouldn't consider myself a gifted individual”—why would you say that? If you answer yes, of course in an honest and humble way—“Yes, I do have gifts”—what makes you say that? What is your gift? What are your gifts? How are you using them?

The Christian congregation in the Greek city Corinth was a gifted congregation. Spiritual gifts of great variety were distributed among many individuals. But that gifted congregation with its many gifted individuals needed to learn something—actually needed to learn a lot—about those gifts. Paul devoted three chapters (84 verses) to the issue, starting in chapter 12: *Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.* For four Sundays in a row together, our second lesson is coming from this section of 1 Corinthians where Paul teaches about spiritual gifts. We don't want to be ignorant about these things, either. So we listen to the word of God.

When learning about spiritual gifts, the first thing we need to understand is that we are the same. We all say the same thing: *Jesus is Lord.* We all hear the name of Jesus, and we call him *Lord.* We all believe the same thing about our Lord Jesus: “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15). We have learned to speak together from the heart: “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him.” We share the same saving faith. We share the same confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ. We share the same desire to serve him. We are the same.

And we are the same in the same way. Paul reminded the Corinthians at the beginning of his letter that they were called to be holy, that God called them into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. They didn't bring themselves to faith. God brought them to faith. *No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.* Same with us. We didn't bring ourselves to faith. We didn't and we don't make ourselves Christians. God the Holy Spirit created Christian faith within us. And the Holy Spirit did that for all of us in the same way. Through the gospel, through the good news about our Savior, Jesus Christ. We have learned to speak together from the heart: “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel. In the same way he calls and gathers the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” Our sameness is to be celebrated. Because the same Spirit has worked the same saving Christian faith in each of us, in all of us. We're the same in the same way.

We are also very different. Here is where we start to talk about spiritual gifts. *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God who works all of them in all men. To each one the manifestation [the disclosure] of the Spirit is given.* Paul listed a whole bunch of gifts that were distributed among many individuals in Corinth: a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, some type of extraordinary faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues or languages, interpreting tongues or languages. Whew! That's quite the range of spiritual gifts! All those same gifts don't necessarily appear in every congregation or in every Christian generation, and there can be other spiritual gifts besides the ones mentioned here. But the point being: God can produce a wide array of gifts and gift each of us in very different ways indeed!

Hang around Emmanuel enough, and you'll see what is apparent about Emmanuel among members of the congregation. There are gifts of wisdom here. A number of people with very good insight into the Scriptures. People who can analyze a life situation, analyze secular society and analyze American church society too, and bring the Word of God to bear on those situations and on those societies. There are gifts of knowledge here. People have personal experience, and they are willing to share what they have learned from the Word of God while going through their own personal experiences. Not all teaching happens in a classroom setting. Some do very well teaching one-on-one in the background in their own quiet way. At times some individuals display a bold and daring confidence in God. They are able to see the big picture, and they are willing to take risks to see what can be done for the kingdom of God. There are gifts of encouragement and healing here. People are able to help others with emotional wounds and help bring godly peace of mind when there is pain and strain. There are gifts of language

here. Some have great ability in expressing themselves in writing. Some are able to speak well in front of public gatherings. Others have the ability to speak and work in foreign languages.

And we go on. There are gifts of leadership here. Some have the ability to inspire others. Some have abilities in administration and organization. Others communicate well and can understand and implement what it takes to make sure people are in the know. There are gifts of many skills and talents here. Some are very adept at working with their hands. Some have strong gifts to be able to design and construct. How about musical gifts? People who can play, people who can sing, some people who just know music, and on top of that, can involve others and use their musical gifts too. There are gifts here that seem a little more intangible, but you recognize the gifts by what they do. Some people are just very caring. Deeply compassionate toward other people. Some people just know people and know their names and never forget a face, and sometimes those gifts translate into a love for and commitment to personal evangelism. There are gifts of giving here. You know, giving itself is a gift to the giver. Great givers don't necessarily have a lot of wealth, and there are many forms of giving that go beyond money. Some people are very generous in giving money. Others are very generous in giving of themselves and whatever they have to benefit someone else who can really use something. Is that enough for now? We could go on. All these I just mentioned are some of the gifts that become apparent at Emmanuel.

We want to recognize these different gifts. We may become self-aware of a particular gift we have, but we don't necessarily recognize our own gifts by staring at ourselves and asking ourselves what we think we are good at. More often we recognize our own gifts by listening to others when they talk about the gifts and talents they see us bringing to the table. That's why it's also important for us keep our eyes open, recognize the gifts in fellow Christians, and encourage them in using their gifts in service to Christ.

Paul doesn't want us to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. When we are ignorant about the fact that God gives different gifts to us, two bad things happen. Either we mope about wanting to be someone else because we crave their gifts, or we magnify ourselves and seek praise for the gifts we possess. Neither is good. Both are bad. We need God's forgiveness for whenever we fall into either category: whether moping or self-magnifying. Thank God we have his forgiveness through Jesus Christ. When we appreciate God's gracious forgiveness to us, then we also learn to appreciate his other gracious gifts to us, including the spiritual gifts in us and in other people.

We're different. And that's a very good thing. Because we are different in the same way. What? Different in the same way? That doesn't make any sense. But, yes, it does. We're different in the same way. You don't have this or that gift because you chose it for yourself. I don't have this or that gift because I chose it for myself. We have these different gifts in the same way: God the Holy Spirit gave them to us. *All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.* He determines where and when and what gifts go to whom for the same purpose: *for the common good.* The gifts from God are there not for self-advantage, but for the advantage of fellow Christians. To build up the body, as Paul will mention in next week's reading. So we truly can and should celebrate the differences among us, meaning the varied gifts among us. We celebrate them by using them for each other in Christian love.

All this talk about spiritual gifts may seem fuzzy at first, but let me tell you something that may put it into focus for you. It's a true story. I used to meet at a fast food restaurant with a man who struggled at times with mental and emotional difficulties. I learned a lot through him and his Christian heart that endured such struggles. But one time I met with him, his struggles had become very acute. He was breaking down and he knew he needed help. Well, as we are talking about this, who enters the restaurant but another man from the congregation who himself had gone through similar difficulties. He joins our table and listens to his Christian brother, shares his experiences with the man, encourages him with God's promises, and tells him what to do to get the help he needs. You see how this works? How the Spirit gives gifts and provides the service and activity for those gifts to be used?

So we are working on this project called Deeper Roots, Higher Sights, Phase 2. It's a building program. There will be opportunities to give financial gifts, yes. But even more, it's an opportunity for our congregation to grow in its use of spiritual gifts. It has been and will continue to be an opportunity for many different people to use many different gifts to accomplish something together. Yes, we'd like a new ministry center. But even more, I pray that we find joy in the process of using our spiritual gifts and working together for the common good of our congregation.

We're the same in the same way. That's a wonderful thing. By the Holy Spirit we all say, "*Jesus is Lord.*" We're also different in the same way. That's a wonderful thing, too. Something to be appreciated and celebrated. *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.* Amen.