

## **2025 01 19 – *Gifts of the Spirit***

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 12:1-13 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

As most of you know, I have an identical twin sister. Her name is Colette. Colette and I did a lot of travelling together in our twenties and we have even taken a few overseas trips in more recent years. Travelling with my twin sister is easy. We like doing the same things. We both have inquisitive minds and enjoy going to museums and learning the history of the places that we visit. Even the rhythm of our day is similar. We tend to get hungry at the same time and, when travelling, like to go to bed early and get up with the sun. I never realized just how easy she is to travel with until, in my thirties, I went on a trip with someone else.

I know that most of you don't have a twin, but many of you do know what it's like to spend time with people who are similar: people of the same age, people with a comparable education, people who like the same sports, people who believe the same things. It's good to be around similar people. It's fun to hang out with people who understand us and who can relate to what's happening in our lives. It's normal to spend time with people who enjoy the same activities that we do. Some might even argue that we all belong to the same church because we have things in common..

But we also know that within our congregation we have a significant amount of diversity. We come from different cultural and religious backgrounds. We are people of different ages. We don't all like the same music or the same food. We

have different levels of income. We have different education, skills and talents that we bring to the ministry of First United..

In today's scripture reading, Paul is writing a letter to the church that he planted or started up in the city of Corinth. Biblical scholars tell us that Paul writes this letter in response to a difficult situation that has arisen in the congregation. It's not clear what exactly has happened, but it is obvious that there is some concern about the spiritual gifts that each person has been given.

Paul, in his letter, makes it clear that all gifts or talents are important. He writes:

There is a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit. There is a variety of ministries, but we serve the same One. There is a variety of outcomes, but the same God is working in all of them.

Paul knows that there many different roles in a church community and lots of different gifts are needed to fill those roles. He knows that diversity is important.

And I agree with him. Yes, it's fun having a twin. She makes for a great travel companion. But I have to admit, if I were putting together a task group, if I were looking for people to help me complete a particular project, I probably wouldn't ask Colette to join me. You see, most of the gifts, the skills that she could offer to the group, already exist within me. If I were putting together a task group, then I would look for people who could offer a variety of talents. I would be looking for a diverse group of people with many different skills and gifts to bring to the task.

Paul, in his letter, goes on to list some of the gifts of the Spirit. He includes: wisdom and knowledge, faith and healing, prophecy and miracles, and even speaking in tongues and the ability to interpret tongues. But there are so many other gifts that exist within a group of people.

This week, I invited you to bring an object which represents one of your gifts with the hope that our communion table would be covered in these symbols. Let's take a moment and see how many gifts we can name (humour, determination, speaking, creativity, drama, music, singing, maintenance, pastoral care, cooking, building, decorating, facilitating, passion for justice, community-building, writing, finance, typing, spreadsheets, word-processing etc). It is an incredible variety of gifts!

Every one of these gifts is important in the ministry of this congregation. These gifts are used in the work of our committees and our interest groups. These gifts are used in the support of our congregation and the work that we do in our community. One of the things that Paul said was, "To each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." For me, this is what makes each person's gift spiritual. It is a manifestation or embodiment of the Spirit. It is being used for the work of the Holy Mystery. It is being used in the pursuit of the kingdom of God; it is being in God's work of peace and justice.

When I was thinking about the gifts that this congregation has, I went through the list of Interest Groups. Some of these groups were here when I came and some have been started in the last few years. Each Interest Group begins because of

the passion and talent of one or two people. I remember when we decided to sponsor a refugee family and a couple of you came to this congregation one Sunday looking to create a new ministry. Even in that one interest group we were looking for expertise in health, finance, government paperwork, housing, and tutoring. We were looking for people with a passion for justice and a gift for pastoral care. And, praise God, within the first week that group was formed.

Today, we are holding a congregational meeting to approve the documents that will be used by our Search Team to find a new minister for this congregation. The Search Team needs to begin its work so that you will be ready to receive a new minister as soon as possible after I leave. To be honest, I think any minister would be lucky to serve in this place and be among so many talented people willing to share their gifts. I am fascinated to see what this new clergy person will bring as gifts to this congregation and how they will manifest the Spirit in your midst. This new minister will, no doubt, be very different from me. And that is a good thing.

Yes, it's easy to work with those who are familiar, especially those who are like us (like a twin). But "the body is not one part it is many," and we need to appreciate our diversity as well as our sameness. What is important is that we are all "working toward the common good." What is important is that our gifts and how we use them embody the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being, the Essence of Love.

May it be so. Amen.