

## “Being Needy”

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1 Corinthians 12

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>4</sup> There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... <sup>11</sup> All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

<sup>12</sup> 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. ... <sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Baptism is a first gift from God. It sets us on a lifetime journey of discipleship, as we follow Jesus. But God gives us other gifts as well – gifts that equip us for that lifetime journey. Gifts that are given so that we can fulfill God’s purpose for us.

God gives such a wide variety of gifts. Some are listed in this chapter from Paul’s letter. Others in Romans and Ephesians. But there are many other gifts that don’t make Paul’s lists. All of these gifts are given for the common good. Paul uses the word *activation*. He says it’s essential. Activation is putting your gift into practice for the good of all God’s children.

Think of it like a credit card you receive in the mail. It has a sticker on it. “Call this 800 number to activate your card.” Do you put a card in your wallet that hasn’t been activated? Not if you’re going to use it. And yet some people receive spiritual gifts but leave the stickers on and never use them. When we don’t use our spiritual gifts the whole community is weakened.

Our sermon title this morning is, “Being Needy.” Being needy is something that generally has negative connotations. We don’t want to be needy – in goods or in relationships. Today we’re going to look at neediness from a different perspective.

We need one another. Paul reminds us in our scripture lesson that just as God arranged the parts of our bodies, so God arranges the members of our communities – all of us having our particular function for the good of the whole.

Last week, our nation celebrated the contributions of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Listen to these words from his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*,

“In a real sense all life is interrelated. All [women and] men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you want to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

What does it mean to be interrelated? To be part of an inescapable network? Is this how we think about our gifts working together? Or does our church reflect God’s call in this way? Or do we all operate rather more independently?

In the body of Christ, all of us and the gifts we bring are interrelated. We can only succeed in our

mission of living into God's kin-dom, when we are working together, truly valuing – and depending on – the gifts that each disciple offers for the good of the whole.

The ego has no place in this mission. There's no room for thinking that we or our gifts are better than someone else or their gifts. As we work together for God's intention, no person and no task is less important than another.

Nancy is one of the women who organize meals for funerals. It may not be a glamorous job but it's invaluable for families who are grieving the loss of a loved one. She also – along with many others – makes cookies and candies for the Cookie Walk in December. The money earned funds ministries and missions around the world.

Darlene lets people know that she sees them and values them as she smiles and shakes their hands.

Wes took on the role of Chairperson of Finance about a year and a half ago. He will quickly tell you that he's not a finance person and yet his particular leadership has similarly been invaluable this past year.

Denny runs the dishwasher.

Others clean wax off pews, serve supper, visit homebound friends, write to elected officials, keep up the church's online presence, tend gardens... the list is endless.

How could we say that one is more important than another?

In our lesson, Paul writes, "If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." Instead, the parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary. The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren't presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity."

Let's use our imaginations for a moment and create a fictitious "Neediness Survey." For each of the following statements, indicate how much you agree or disagree by how many fingers you hold up. One, if you completely disagree; five, if you agree totally. Be honest, now. Ready?

- ♡ It's okay to need another person's help.
- ♡ I can provide everything that I need for myself.
- ♡ Don't ask me for help. I'll offer help when I can.
- ♡ I would come close to death before I'd consider asking for help.
- ♡ It makes me uncomfortable to ask for help.

This is a thoroughly unscientific poll, yet it can still reveal things about us.

We are uncomfortable being vulnerable. We don't like feeling exposed. We are uncomfortable asking for help. We don't like for people to think we're not capable. We want to appear self-reliant. It's what we've been taught to be. And we don't want people to think less of us. We feel that we seldom have time to help others.

Yet, we need each other. This isn't simply some ancient idea. God creates us this way. "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it."

When it comes to recognizing the interrelated nature of our gifts, we need to come to terms with our own vulnerability and dependency. This isn't a popular notion but to be the people and the church God calls us to be, we have to accept not only that we need one another but that it's okay. In fact, it's good to need each other. It's good to lean on each other. It's good to share our gifts, talents and skills with others and to allow them to do the same for us.

The reality is that there are many parts of the body, the church, that aren't always functioning as God intends. Those parts, those people, often don't realize how this hurts the whole.

I am not meaning to guilt anyone. This is not about saying you need to do more. What I am saying, in love and honesty, is that we need you. We need all of us.

God has gifted you in ways that God has not gifted me. I need to show up and share my gifts. And I need you to show up and share your gifts, because without all of our gifts, this church will not function the way God means for it to function. And that our goal, isn't it? To function as God intends?

To fulfill the call on our lives and be who God creates us to be in the context of this community? Of course, this is our goal!

What gifts do you have to offer?

Howard Thurman is credited with saying, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

What makes you come alive? Because those things that make you come alive are gifts, passions, that are God-given.

I'll be honest, in a church we need you to use your spiritual gifts. And we need you to use your mind and your body for other things that aren't your spiritual gifts because in all honesty there are tasks that just need to be done.

You may find your calling as you sing at the nursing homes. Or you may sing there because you can and your voice is needed. You may work with unemployed persons to help them gain job skills because it's your passion or you may simply show up because there's a need, hoping for a sense of satisfaction on completion.

Sometimes we know we have a passion or a gift and we start from that place. Other times we work where there is a need and along the way we discover a passion for the job that we are doing. Either way, we activate the gift and we use them for the good of all.

There is one more piece to this gifts idea that we need to consider. Come back next week as we explore this final and crucial piece.

Amen.