

1 Corinthians 12:1-11    2nd Sunday after Epiphany    January 19, 1992

About a year ago, an invitation came in the mail to begin a study group. A date of gathering was set, ten or twelve pastors showed up.

What books will we read was the question at hand. A number of suggestions were made. A debate began as to what we would choose first.

Chris made a suggestion, one that I did not like very well. I told him so. Not so very gently I suggested that the kind of thinking that book represented was just what was wrong with the church. Now I had not read the book, I knew only in the broadest outlines what the book had to say. But that did not stop me from calling into question the faithfulness of the book and those who would like it.

Now I did not change Chris' mind with my tirade. But there was one lasting result, Chris has never come back to the group. In fact, Chris has not been around much any time the pastor's meet. Fighting for the truth, and what was right (or so I thought) I inflicted a serious wound on the body of Christ.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

~~But~~ No noisy gong or clanging cymbal ever did the damage I have done.

What if I had remembered that God's spirit was not only in me, but in Chris that day?

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; there are varieties of services but the same Lord; there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Paul wrote these words to a congregation in which everyone thought they had it right. Each of those Corinthians thought that God was somehow theirs, their own, in a way that he did not belong to their fellow Christians. So certain were they of God's Spirit within them, that they

were intent on creating every other Christian in their own image. No longer listening they were all speaking. Division, chaos, disorder was the result.

What Paul sought to help them understand is that God did not make us all to be look alike Christians. God's Spirit is not in the business of mass producing Christians who think just like me, and do just as I do. There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit. There are varieties of services but the same Lord. There are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

How great a gift it is when we are able to no longer sit in judgement one of another, but to treasure our neighbor as the temple of the Holy Spirit. I firmly believe that Jesus died for me, and that all my sins are forgiven. ~~Will I believe the same, just as firmly, for my neighbor?~~ Will I believe the same, just as firmly, for my neighbor? The same Spirit who gives me gifts gives gifts to my neighbor, the same Lord whom I serve is the one my neighbor is serving, the same God who makes my activities important to me, makes my neighbor's activities important also.

To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good.

Why has Jesus Spirit made our bodies his temple? So that my needs may be met, so that I may be glorified, so that I may feel close to God? No, so that the body of Christ may be built up, or as Paul says here, for the common good.

As all of you look at me right now, you can see how obviously true that is of me. As a pastor I am here not to meet my needs, but to serve my Lord as I serve all those for whom he has died. But as I look at you I realize the same is true of you. God has not called you here to meet your needs, SURPRISE! He has called you here to meet your neighbors needs, he gives you his spirit for the common good. In Christ God has already given you all that you need for your life now and for all eternity. But now he wants you to be the means of his loving others.

How different it could have been with Chris and I had I remembered all of that. I could have listened, I could have treasured Christ in him, I could have been the love of God coming to him. But what could have been is now lost. The body of Christ is injured. And since I can never declare that my neighbor must forgive me, I cannot say whether that injury will ever be healed in this life.

Within the body of Christ every day such wounds are afflicted. Because we wound one another so often, we tend to forget how serious is the need for reconciliation. We tend to gloss over how it pains our Lord when there is not love in his body. We act as if we who have the Spirit have a right to our neighbor's forgiveness, a right even to hurt our neighbor. But this is Jesus word to every one of us: When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother or sister and then come and offer your gift. Or if you are the offended, Jesus word is forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

For Jesus says to us all: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.