

I want to show you what makes me different from other people: my thumb. I'm so proud of this thumb that bends in an almost 90 degree angle. Try yours. I'll bet there are not many of you who can bend your thumb like this. I discovered this wonder sometime when I was in elementary school. A person sitting nearby saw me pushing some clay. how can you do that she asked?

What?

Bend you thumb like that?

From that moment on I knew that I was special.

Now I'd like to tell you that I worked and I practiced and I trained my thumb to be like this but the truth is: I was born this way. I had nothing to do with it. Just like so many other things that we take pride in.

Like being tall.

Or being white.

Or being ^{female or} male.

Or having a beautiful singing voice.

Or growing up in the depression.

Or being raised in a family that was wealthy.

Or poor.

Or having endured an illness.

Or having feelings of empathy for others.

Or having good eyesight,
Or being good with mechanical things.

Or beautiful hands.

Or broad shoulders.

Or intelligence.

Once St. Paul asked. "What do you have that you did not receive? If you received it as a gift, then why do you boast?"

How foolish for me to be proud of a thumb. But I am.

And so are all of you proud of those things great and small that others may notice about you. And say a kind word about, or better yet a word of envy.

There must have been a lot of those envious words in the congregation at Corinth. The Corinthians were full of enthusiasm about how God had gifted them. ^{with special emphasis on the word "me"} Some would speak words of great wisdom, others of spiritual knowledge, still others great faith, or gifts of healing, some of them prided themselves on miracles they could perform, others telling of God's will in the present and for the future, some were led to sense who was possessed by an evil spirit, who possessed by the Holy Spirit, some spoke in tongues, speaking the language of heaven already now on earth. Worship in Corinth must have been like a three ring circus, everyone wanting to show off what God had done in them.

Have you ever been in a group where everyone is intent on showing their importance and no one is ready to be the audience? Every day was like that in the Corinthian congregation.

Paul writes: Now there are varieties of gifts but the same spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord and 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.

^{Whether} ~~Whether~~ Christians have remarkable gifts of the spirit like healing, or whether they wait tables as the community gathers which is what the word services means, or whether they care for the poor, one God, Spirit, Son and Father is the source. And the gifts are given for the good of all, for the common good.

If I have been given the gift to preach a sermon, that gift comes from God, and is given so that the whole community might be blessed. If you are

given the gift to read the holy scriptures or ^{Serve} ~~what~~ at this table, that gift comes from God and is given that the whole community might be blessed. If you have been given the gift of wealth and a spirit of compassion to share, that gift and spirit are given by God that the whole community might be blessed.

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

This sermon is about remembering that one verse. If I have been given a special thumb, that thumb is given for serving you and not for seeking a ride for myself. If you have been gifted by God with a heart to care for others in need, that special gift of caring is given that you might use it for the good of others. If you have been given a gift in managing, that gift is given that you might serve all of God's people and the community will be blessed.

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

To each. Not to some. Not to a few. But to each. To you.

God has given you a gift for service within this community of faith. If God has given you a kind word to speak, and you do not, how great the loss to you and to us all.

A book I've been reading cites study after study that shows how people who have been given a gift are more likely to help others. People who have been helped in their need are more likely to pass that help on.

In Jesus Christ God has been gracious with you. In Jesus Christ God has been blinded to your sin. God looks at you and sees only Christ's love. In Christ God does not see the death I deserve but only the life Christ has won for me. In Christ God does not measure me and give ~~me what I deserve.~~ ^{accordingly} but God measures Christ and so gives ^{you} ~~me~~ what ^{you} ~~I~~ need for his sake.

In Jesus Christ God has been gracious to you and me. And now we will touch another life with the love we have received, and another and another. And there will follow a chain reaction greater than can be released from an

atom. Love will grow, and blessings, and God will be praised. And
thanked. And worshipped.

God has planted you in this place, just for this purpose. Amen.