

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Robert Alexander
“The Common Good”
Genesis 11: 1-9; 1 Corinthians 12: 4-13
6th Sunday after Pentecost
June 26, 2016**

When my children were younger and didn't know any better I had a wonderful game that we would play together when things got a little too noisy. It is the Hold Your Breath game. OK everyone, on the count of three we are all going to hold our breath. One, two, three, go. (Pause) And magically, even if just for a few seconds, there was quiet in the house. Of course it didn't last long because we needed to breathe. We were created that way.

The story of creation in scripture assigns this life giving act to God. God breathed into humanity the breath of life. In earlier sermons you have heard that the Hebrew word for breath is *ruach*. The Greek word is *pneuma*. These words can also be translated wind or spirit. When we breathe, in and out, we perform a simple, yet profound and very intimate act that connects us with the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Every breath that we take is an opportunity to remember that we are created by God for the purpose of a relationship that is beyond ourselves. And it is in this relationship with God and the subsequent relationships with family, faith community, friends, and neighbors where we come to understand who we are and for what purpose we were given life.

The church in Corinth was in its infancy and beginning to understand what it meant to ask the question, “What does our life mean now that we have committed to following Jesus Christ?” They felt the presence of God in their midst and they were using their gifts. But in their zeal they compared themselves with one another, competing with each other for the prize of “being most spirit-filled!”

It was as if there were two opposing teams in a sporting contest yelling back and forth across the arena, “We've Got Spirit Yes We Do! We've Got Spirit How About You?” (Try this out!) The only problem being that they were supposed to all be on the same team.

In chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul reminded the church that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to all those who proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. Everyone in the church is gifted by the Spirit and the Spirit makes those gifts active in us all. The gifts are not to be used for our own glory or to compete with one another but rather for the benefit of all – for the common good.

Paul goes on to say that those in the church are all baptized into one body by the power of the Holy Spirit. I understand that everyone here this morning may not be baptized. It is an important sacrament in the church which proclaims God's grace and never-ending love for us which is given as a gift before we are even able to utter the words “Thank you!” Baptism is the way that we as a family of faith welcome those whom God has created and called in love. If you have not been baptized and would like to speak with one of the pastors about it I invite you to contact one of us and let us know.

There is a great scene in the movie “Finding Nemo” when Nemo – the little clown fish from the reef, after being placed in a fish-tank, is officially welcomed into the club that the group of fish has established. The fish gather around him to receive him into the Fraternal Bonds of Tankhood. Once the initiation has taken place we discover that Nemo has something that none of the other fish have that may enable them to escape from the tank. He is small enough to swim into the filter and clog it up. All the fish long to return to the ocean and it turns out that Nemo has the gift that will help them to freedom.

Nemo's story reminds us that all of us, no matter our place in the Body, have something to contribute in order that we might more fully live.

I am not going to go into each of the gifts that Paul lists here to the Corinthians. It is not an exhaustive list. There are other places in scripture where there are different lists of gifts. Those listed here, however, may give us some clue as to what was going on in Corinth and what was important in the early church there – preaching, teaching, healing, sharing wisdom, praying in tongues and interpreting such tongues so that all can understand

what is being said. All of these gifts come from the one Spirit and are meant to be used for the common good. They are not meant to create division but rather to bring the people of God together for a common purpose.

In our Old Testament lesson this morning we heard about a people who came together for a common purpose, but their purpose was self-serving. They were not interested in living for God's glory but rather in making a name for themselves. We read that God confused their language so that they would stop what they were doing. God stopped them from making a terrible mistake – uniting for the wrong reason – coming together to make a name for themselves and forgetting the purpose for which they were created. Their actions caused them to forget the name that they had already been given: “Child of God.” How often has that happened in human history? And sometimes with disastrous consequences!

This Body of which we are a part is not our own but it is the Body of Christ. We are brought together by the power of the Holy Spirit to be One Body with Christ as our Head so that we can fully live into the identity that we are given at creation – Child of God. When we ignore our name or try and seek another name, we make a mess of the beautiful creation that God has made. This, I believe, is the primary reason for the pain in our world today.

Even in the church sometimes we forget who we are and do not live up to our full potential. It reminds me of an ad I once read for the “Lite Church of the Valley.”

Has the heaviness of your old fashioned church got you down? Try us! We are the new and improved Lite Church of the Valley. Studies have shown we have 24% fewer commitments than other churches. We guarantee to trim off guilt, because we are Low-Cal...low Calvin, that is. We are the home of the 7.5% tithe. We promise 35 minute worship services, with 7 minute sermons. Next Sunday's exciting text is the story of the Feeding of the 500. We have only 6 Commandments – Your choice!! We use just 3 gospels in our contemporary New Testament “Good Sound Bites for Modern Human Beings.” We take the offering every other week, all major credit cards accepted, of course. You don't have to actually do anything that we teach and you certainly don't have to share any of it. Yes, the New and Improved Lite Church of the Valley could be just what you are looking for. We are everything you want in a church...and less!

Paul reminds us that there is a much better way.

It is the way of Christ, where we seek God's will and not our own. Where we seek God's Kingdom first and God's righteousness. Where we practice love in all things (he goes into great detail about this in Chapter 13). And where we value each person in the community and appreciate their contributions – no matter their age. Children, youth, and adults of all ages are part of the community and have gifts to share that have been given to them by the Holy Spirit. All of them are to be used for the Common Good.

My friend Robert Moody is the music director of the nearby Winston-Salem Symphony. He tells me that an average orchestra is around 75 members. There can be between 20 and 40 different instruments. Each player is expected to be an expert in playing their instrument. If you play violin, you are expected to do your best playing the violin. If you play the bassoon you are expected to do your best playing that instrument. No one expects a clarinet player to be able to play the cello. Everyone is expected to give their very best playing their part. Only the conductor can see the whole score. The conductor is expected to know the score inside and out and to have a vision for how all the different parts will fit together. He or she should be able to hear the sound that they want to achieve before anyone ever plays a note. Through their hand motions, body language, and the waving of the baton, the conductor communicates this vision so that the orchestra members can play together and create a beautiful piece of music.

In one recent video that I saw and listened to of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, the musicians, instrumentalists and chorus, gave their all as they crescendoed into the final minutes of the symphony with the familiar Ode to Joy. It was indeed beautiful!

This is another way to think about the church. We are each given a gift to share for the common good. What part are you called to play? Will you play your part so loud that someone else cannot be heard? Will I forget

to come in at all and miss a crucial part in the music? Will someone storm off stage and miss the performance altogether?

A couple of years ago we began to offer classes that helped people discover the joy of being disciples of Jesus Christ here at DCPC. We used the outline of our Vision Statement – speaking each week about a different theme – Worshipping – Learning – Serving – and Giving. We wove Love into each of the four themes with the same idea that the Apostle Paul expresses in 1 Corinthians 13 – that love is the more excellent way and that no matter what we do in the church if it isn't done in a spirit of love then it won't have any lasting impact. In fact it won't make beautiful music at all but rather just a lot of noise!

As part of this class we began to offer a Spiritual Gifts Inventory that gave people the opportunity to discern how they had been gifted by the Holy Spirit and how they might use that in the life of the church here at Davidson College Presbyterian Church.

Just looking in your bulletin today you see that there are no shortage of opportunities for sharing gifts.

- There are needs for teachers, shepherds and helpers with Vacation Bible School
- There are needs for people to serve in our nursery caring for the youngest members of our church family
- There are needs on our Congregational Care Committee to reach out to those in our own community of faith. For example – we have three families who have just had babies that could use some support.
- We have invitations for prayer warriors to be in prayer for our members serving in the military and for those heading to the Montreat Music and Worship Conference.
- We have opportunities to help feed hungry children right in our backyard through our Blythe Partnership.

And you know that this barely scratches the surface of the opportunities available.

So what is your gift? If you know, then are you willing to use it in the way that it was intended to be used? If you don't know what your gift is, are you willing to explore that and find out how you might use your gift in the church?

Whatever the case, I pray that you will use it for the benefit of all. I pray that you will remember that your gift is given by God to you so that you can participate in making some spectacular music along with the other members of this orchestra. And I pray that we will all use our gifts for the common good – living up to and into our name – Body of Christ. **To God be the Glory! Amen.**