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1 Cor. 12:1-11

Many Gifts, One Spirit

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Everybody put your hand on your forehead. Are you feeling warm? Did you catch the fever last week? Powerball fever swept the nation! We learned Wednesday night that three winning ticket holders will divide up 1.5 billion dollars. That's a massive pile of money!

I heard someone this week say, "What if our church won that prize? What if God gave Hope Lutheran Church 1.5 billion dollars? What would we do with it? How would we use it to carry out our mission? How many lives could we impact with such a gift?"

Well, in his wisdom, the good Lord did not see fit to divide up a big pile of cash among the church members here. But our God has seen to fit divide up some other very special gifts among the people of Hope.

The Bible teaches us today that God is giving every single member of this church a unique, personalized set of gifts. A rather spectacular set of special presents and endowments for each one of us. Not cash. Something different. Something incredible. Something that our church really needs. Something that this congregation can really use to get the Lord's work done, and to carry out our mission.

We're talking today about the topic of spiritual gifts, ministry gifts. The Scripture for today, 1 Corinthians 12, makes it clear that God has given to you, and to each of us here, a one-of-a-kind collection of gifts and passions, temperament and ability, personality and experience. In other words, God

has created you and shaped your life in an absolutely unique fashion.

Now let's read verses 4-6 together. *"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone."*

And that is exactly the way it is here at Hope Lutheran Church. There are hundreds and hundreds of wonderfully-talented, super-gifted, exceedingly-accomplished people in this congregation. And there are dozens and dozens of ways in which the people of Hope are actively participating in the ministry and service of the church.

What about you? What do you want to do with your personal gifts and talents? How do you want to utilize your particular passions here in the church? Whom do you wish to impact for Christ with your own unique temperament, personality, and experience? Those are pretty good questions, aren't they?

Actually, today's Bible reading teaches us that those are the wrong questions! The message of God for us today is that we need to take the word "you" out of those questions. The real questions are these. What does God want you to do with your gifts and talents? How does God wish for you to make use of your particular personality and passions? Whom does the Holy Spirit wish for you to impact with your unique temperament and your life-experiences?

What does God want your place in the church's work to be?

See, I don't think that God wants anyone to just sit back and watch what's going on in this church. The Lord's not

interested in having a small group of super-charged, heroic Christians doing all the work in this church. He's gifted us all, and shaped us all, so that we can all be involved.

Read verse 7 with me, please. *"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."* What does that verse mean for you, as a member of this church? This verse is absolutely incredible! This Scripture is saying that no matter how old or young you are, no matter how if you're a Bible expert or a Bible slacker, God's Spirit can and will work through you for the common good. *"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."*

God wants you, in your own unique way, to help the church reach its goals and carry out its mission. And God has formed and fashioned you for that purpose. God has manifested his Spirit in you, to help in some way that no one else can.

What if we were all taking these verses seriously? What if every single Hpe member were making full use of his or her our own skill sets and life-experiences to spread the Gospel, to share Christ's love, to teach the faith, to impact our community for Christ, to help others learn of the mercy and forgiveness Christ won for us all on the cross? There'd be no stopping this church! There'd be no limit to what we could do for Christ!

And that's not just some pastor day-dreaming in the pulpit. That's the way God wants it! That's exactly what God's Word is describing here in 1 Corinthians 12. We are all given spiritual gifts, it says, ministry gifts to be used for the common good.

We read in verses 8-10 a short list of such gifts. And some of these are very unusual gifts that many of us do not have --

such as miracle-working, healing, speaking in tongues, ability to interpret tongues. But this isn't a complete listing of all of God's ministry gifts. The Bible lists other gifts, in other places. And God's Holy Spirit gives to each one of us some manifestation, some set of gifts and abilities, that we can use in the church.

Read verse 11 with me, please. *"All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."*

*"To each one individually as he wills."* Do you know what God is willing you do to? Do you know where God wants your gifts to fit in, how you can help, whose life you can make a real difference in for Christ? If you do, then get to it! If you're not sure, then God's Word can help you today.

Take your pen or pencil, and underline three phrases in today's reading. Underline, in verse 4, the words, *"God who empowers them all."* In verse 7, *"for the common good."* And in verse 11, *"as he wills."*

Take your bulletin home today. Read those words you underlined, and ponder them. Read over and over those three phrases, and pray about them. Pray about your church, and pray about the place God wants you to have in the work here. Talk to God about the specific gifts and activities that he wants to empower in you. Ask him about how you can serve the common good, and about the gifts he's apportioned to you as he wills.

Come back for the next couple of weeks, and we're going to study the rest of 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 together in our sermons. We'll keep talking about the gifts God has given you, and how they can be used here at Hope.

May God bless you all today, and bless the part you can play in our church. Amen.