

“Shine Light on Our Gifts” – 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

I suspect most of you have heard numerous sermons on this passage, so many, that as we hear these words read, they can become white noise. But, if we understand why Paul wrote these words, we may be able to hear more than white noise.

The Corinth church was a vibrant community where members received varieties of gifts from the Spirit. At the same time, the church did not have a consensus on, or a clear understanding about, spiritual gifts. Many of them were in rivalry with other members. Some claimed they were better than others because of their spiritual gifts. The problem is they did not ask what they could do for the common good or what the Spirit wanted them to do (with these gifts).

Paul's response to the community is interesting and diplomatic.

(He) does not begin with a direct, strong emotional charge against the Corinthians. Rather he says, 'I do not want you to be uninformed.' He means they could know better. Thus, he tackles a matter of understanding rather than disgracing them directly. (Yung Suk Kim, Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11, workingpeacher.org)

As he does this, Paul also reminds the community that everyone is gifted, that all gifts are valued and are to be used for common good. Unfortunately, this is not a message heard or encouraged in our world today.

Understanding this, I want to share with you a story which is really a children's story, “*The Color of Friendship.*”

Once upon a time the colors of the world started to quarrel. All claimed they were the best. The most important. The most useful. The favorite.

Green said: 'Clearly I am the most important. I am the sign of life and hope. I was chosen for grass, trees and leaves. Without me, all animals would die. Look over the countryside and you will see that I am in the majority.'

Blue interrupted: 'You only think about the earth. Consider the sky and sea. It is the water that is the basis of life and drawn up by the clouds from the deep sea. The sky gives space and peace and serenity. Without my peace, you would all be nothing.'

Yellow chuckled: 'You are all so serious. I bring laughter, gaiety, and warmth into the world. The sun is yellow, the moon is yellow, the stars are yellow. Every time you look at a sunflower, the whole world starts to smile. Without me there would be no fun.'

Orange started to blow her trumpet: 'I am the color of health and strength. I may be scarce, but I am precious for I serve the needs of human life. I carry the most important vitamins. Think of carrots, pumpkins, oranges, mangoes and papayas. I don't hang around all the time, but when I fill the sky at sunrise or sunset, my beauty is so striking that no one gives another thought to any of you.'

Red could stand it no longer, and he shouted out: 'I am the ruler of all of you. I am blood – life's blood! I am the color of danger and of bravery. I am willing to fight for a cause. I bring fire into the blood. Without me, the earth would be as empty as the moon. I am the color of passion and of love, the red rose, the poinsettia and the poppy.'

Purple rose up to its full height. He was very tall and spoke with great pomp: 'I am the color of royalty and power. Kings, chiefs, and bishops have always chosen me'

for I am the sign of authority and wisdom. People do not question me! They listen and obey.'

Finally, Indigo spoke, much more quietly than all the others, but with just as much determination: 'Think of me. I am the color of silence. You hardly notice me, but without me you all become superficial. I represent thought and reflection, twilight and deep water. You need me for balance and contrast, for prayer and inner peace.'

Their quarreling became louder and louder. Suddenly there was a startling flash of bright lightening thunder rolled and boomed. Rain started to pour down relentlessly. The colors crouched down in fear, drawing close to one another for comfort. In the midst of the clamor, rain began to speak: 'You foolish colors, fighting amongst yourselves, each trying to dominate the rest. Don't you know that you were made for a special purpose, unique and different? Join hands with one another and come to me.' Doing as they were told, the colors united and joined hands. The rain continued: 'From now on, when it rains, each of you will stretch across the sky in a great bow of color as a reminder that you can all live in peace. The rainbow is a sign of hope for tomorrow.' And so, whenever a good rain washes the world, and a rainbow appears in the sky, let us remember to appreciate one another.

Preparing for the Interfaith Service, held last Monday, celebrating the life and legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I could not help but make the connection between this story, scripture, and King's words of warning. *We must learn to live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools.*

These words challenge us to go beyond appreciation, to respecting, accepting and affirming one another, including those outside of our community and particular social circles, and learn to work for the common good of all humanity.

Unlike the early Corinthian Church, for us it is not a matter of understanding. We know better what God desires. We may not like it sometimes, we may want to do it, but we know what to do. For as Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote,

*We are made for goodness. We are made for love.
We are made for friendliness. We are made for togetherness.
We are made for all beautiful things that you and I know.
We are all made to tell the world that there are no outsiders.
All, all are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich, poor,
educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all, all.
We are meant all, all to belong to this family, this human family, God's family.*

We have all been gifted by God, and our gifts can and do make a difference. In this season of Epiphany, when we are called to shine light on our gifts, hear again these words from Marianne Williamson.

*You are a child of God; your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There is nothing enlightening about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us.
It is not just in some of us, it is in everyone
and as we let our own light shine
we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.*

For such is the beauty, wonder and miracle we discover when, in faith, we dare to shine light on our collective gifts.