



For as in one body
we have many members,
& the members do not all
have the same function,
so we, though many, are
one body in Christ,
& individually members
one of another.

Romans 12:4-5

August 23, 2020

Introduction

Invitation

Call to Worship:

L: I am the church; you are the church; we are the church together.

P: But we aren't together in one place.

L: In spite of keeping social distancing, we are still connected through the power of the Holy Spirit.

P: So, wherever we are, let us worship our God together!

Hymn: "Many Gifts, One Spirit"

Reading the Word: Romans 12:1-8

Message: "Gifts"

Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

Prayer:

We worship together as the Body of Christ, O God. Yet, we each have been given a variety of gifts to use. We recognize that, in this time of worshiping at a distance physically from each other, we find using those gifts more challenging. However, you remind us that we still have many ways to share our gifts, through reaching out to someone who is lonely, sending cards, making phone calls, sending emails, remembering to send our financial gifts, and praying for church members, friends, and the world. Help us to use our gifts so that the Body of Christ may be active through us wherever we are. Thank you, God, for your love and generosity. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: "Bind Us Together"

Blessing

Romans 12:1-8

The New Life in Christ

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry in ministering; the teacher in teaching; the exhorter in exhortation; the giver in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate in cheerfulness.





**SERMON TRANSCRIPT
GIVEN BY
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson**

Message “Gifts”
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

This passage from Paul’s letter to the church in Rome teaches the congregation there, and all of us, about what it means to be the Church. Romans 12:1-8 reminds us that we are made new - transformed - by believing in Christ, and that moves us to living as children of God. We live in the ways Jesus has taught us to live, with compassion, empathy, connection with one another, and sharing God’s love and grace.

When we are baptized and welcomed into the Church, we become a part of what Paul calls “the Body of Christ.” This imagery reminds us that we are connected together, and we make up different parts of Christ’s Body, which is the Church. As members of a church community, we each have something to offer through the gifts God has given us to share. When we bring our gifts and participate together, we make the Body of Christ whole.

It is important to remember that not everyone has the same gifts. Paul lists some of them in verses 6-8, but there are so many more. How do we discover them? How do we know what our gifts are? When we explore the gifts we see in our worship services or our church activities we find many: preaching, leading worship, singing, offering musical accompaniment or special music, reading scripture, teaching Sunday school, ushering, greeting, helping to keep the building in good maintenance, overseeing our financial state, caring for the sick and shut-ins, serving or bringing food for fellowship time or public suppers, giving generously to help the church financially, praying for the church, and so much more. These are the things that pull us together as a church. These are the gifts that make us function as a whole community of faith.

As we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, however, many of those things are not happening right now because we are practicing social distancing. So what does that mean for our call to share our gifts and be part of the Body of Christ? Is the Body fractured? I don’t think so because the Body of Christ is more than worshiping together, more than music, more than preaching. Full-bodied worship continues wherever we are, wherever we live, act, and are the Church wherever we live, work, or play.

The gifts we have to share are in and beyond our specific community of faith at First United Methodist Church, Portsmouth, NH. Our calling is to embody the gifts God has given us, the gifts we see in the teachings and example of Jesus. One commentator wrote that “The church is a body that gives Christ a face to the world, Christ’s voice, hands, and feet. We grow into our identity as members of the Body of Christ when we grow in empathy for others who are members.”*

We use our God-given gifts in the world in ministry for Christ. How? We have regularly named the outreach programs we have been doing at First UMC: End 68 Hours of Hunger, Seacoast Family Promise, Kids First, and many others. These are important outreach programs that are part of our ministry together as a church.

However, I want to also emphasize that our individual gifts have been honed and build up within our community context. We have learned about what God wants us to share with others as we have worshiped, worked together, learned from each other, learned from scripture, and prayer. Our worship together has prepared us to live in the world, and not to be conformed to it, as verse 2 in our scripture passage says. As I mentioned earlier, we have been transformed in order to bring our gifts into the world to use wherever we are.

Most likely, many of us can name the gifts that lead us to action, the ones that lead us to being the hands and feet of Christ in this world. What other gifts bring the presence of Christ to the world? I hope the first thing on each person's list is prayer. Pray for others; pray for the world. Prayer aligns us with the heart and mind of Christ. Prayer opens us to connecting with others. Prayer opens us to empathy. Searching within ourselves to find where that empathy leads us will help us learn more of where God is calling us. We aren't all prophets, preachers, teachers, or leaders, but we all have gifts to give through the compassion and grace God gives us and asks us to offer to others.

This week, I hope you will discover your gifts, or if you are pretty sure of what they are, I hope you will find ways to use them for Christ, and in the process, discover even more gifts. How will all of us bring the face of Christ to the world? How will we be the voice, hands, and feet of Christ to others? Amen.

*Written by Alyce McKenzie and found at Text This Week in her commentary on this scripture passage.