

**CHRISTIAN EQUALITY**  
**I. Don't Think You Are Better**  
**II. Different Gifts**  
**III. Same Virtues**

SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 2021 | EPIPHANY

**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

<i>Old Testament</i>	Deu 18:15-19
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 84, CW p. 96
<i>Epistle</i>	Romans 12:6–16
<i>Gospel</i>	John 2:1–11
<i>Chief Hymn</i>	ELH 189, 190

GRANTS PASS

Divine Service, Rite Two, ELH p. 60  
The Entrance Hymn or Introit – ELH 158 As with Gladness Men of Old  
Chief Hymn – ELH 451 All That I Was  
Distribution Hymn – ELH 324 O Jesus, at Your Altar Now  
Closing Hymn – ELH 190 O Bless the House, Whate'er Befall

MEDFORD

The Common Service, CW p.15  
Psalm 84, CW p. 96  
Opening Hymn - CW 83 As with Gladness Men of Old  
Hymn of the Day – CW 389 Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me  
Distribution Hymn - CW 313 Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior  
Closing Hymn - CW 506 Oh, Blest the House, Whate'er Befall

Faith & Our Savior Lutheran Churches  
Medford & Grants Pass, Oregon  
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Romans 12:3–16 (CSB) (Notice that I am pulling from the middle of last week’s Epistle Lesson, because it goes with this week’s.)

**<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one. <sup>4</sup> Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup> According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one’s faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.**

**<sup>9</sup> Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. <sup>11</sup> Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.**

Dear fellow redeemed: If you are a Christian, then you are the way you are because of whom Christ has made you, by grace, through faith. You are justified, declared innocent before God. You bear the righteousness of Christ because of his life, and you are forgiven because of his atoning death.

By faith you receive what He has given, but that faith that the Spirit works in you is a spiritual life that changes us. Last week, we looked at two sentences that tell how Christians, who are alive in Christ, are different from the unbelieving world. First is our life, and second our worldview.

Today we follow Paul into the details of this. Our life we live for him, according to the gifts Our Lord has given us. This is why this text is a basis of ...

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**I. Don’t Think You Are Better**  
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**I. Don’t Think You Are Better**

Paul writes **<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as [because] God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.** If at this point, you are estimating the measure of faith you have in comparison with someone else, then you weren’t listening. Paul isn’t talking about how much faith you have, but BECAUSE you have a measure faith. Faith is spiritual life. Do you compare how much life you have compared to somebody else? Life cannot be quantified in this sense.

He goes on: **<sup>4</sup> Now as we have many parts in one body, and all the parts do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> in the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup> According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts:** Are you thinking of the gifts you have and feeling pretty good about yourself, especially in comparison to others? Then you haven’t been listening. What is the best part of

your body? Your pretty eyes, or your smelly feet, or your sweat glands? You need them all, even if your eyes are pretty (or hawk-like, if you are a guy.) Your feet really miss your eyes if you stub your toe in the dark because you cannot see, and your eye suffers plenty if your feet can't keep you from falling over and smashing your face. And you don't even want to know what happens to somebody who can't sweat.

The point is that just as no part of our bodies are better than another, just different, so Christians are of the same value to Christ and the church whatever gifts he has given them.

This truth is rooted in the Biblical teaching of justification and sanctification. When you were brought to faith, you were united with Christ and your life and view of the world were changed. **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!"** (2 Corinthians 5:17, CSB) You were justified, declared righteous and innocent, and therefore were sanctified, changed in your life and worldview. It is NOT the other way around. It isn't that you have achieved such a Christian life that you achieved righteousness. One causes the other. Justification leads to sanctification, not the other way around. Faith receives the gifts God gives, we don't have the gifts of faith and then faith comes.

## **II. Different Gifts**

Accordingly, the "gifts" Paul speaks of here in the first part of our text are the "charismata," the gifts of the spirit: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy. Paul wanted the Roman Christians to know, Christ through Paul wants His church to know, that using the talents you are born with, the Spirit bestows CHARISMATA, spiritual gifts. These are not miraculous gifts, for those are for special circumstances. These are gifts that now, for the Christian, are used in faith and according to THE faith. **<sup>6</sup> According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's [THE] faith;**

Whatever talent you have is now used in love for God, to His glory, and according to THE faith, the revelation of God. Again, in view of the mercies of God, we live our lives and we understand this world differently as Christians.

Paul then gets specific. **If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one's [THE] faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.**

Here's the thing: Our ascended Savior has given talents and abilities for the good of His church and wants you to use them. (He is speaking here about the way we live among Christians; the world is another lesson.) "Prophecy" here means to proclaim God's words to others, to declare the truth. If you are good at that, as a preacher, as a teacher, as someone having a neighborly conversation over a pizza, or in teaching your kids, do it in faith and according to THE faith, God's word.

If you are good at serving, that is at creating the social situation that nourishes the body and the fellowship, then do that. In this time of COVID, those who make connections with people are a godsend.

Teaching and explaining God's word? Then do that.

How are you at exhortation? What's that? Have you ever known someone who can correct your error without seeming holier than thou, but instead makes you want to correct your errors? Sort of like a good coach, but including the moral dimension. Then do that.

How about giving – enriching lives? Then be generous. How about leading, encouragement, showing the way, then do that. How about showing mercy – being gracious. Then do so without holding anything against someone.

These are all different gifts, and I'm sure Paul wouldn't call this exhaustive. Though these gifts are different, we can't take credit for them any more than we can take credit for blue eyes or brown. They are gifts.

Paul's point is that we are to use them.

### **III. Same Virtues**

But while we are called to use our different gifts, we all called to exercise the same virtues. We don't talk about virtues much, do we? It is important for us as Christians to not only know the sins we are to avoid, but the good things to which we are called. Each of the commandments includes both.

As Paul instructs us in our life and worldview he speaks of some of the Christian virtues that we live out especially among Christians: <sup>9</sup> **Let love be without hypocrisy.** Love everyone the same for the sake of Christ. **Detest evil; cling to what is good.** "Evil" is "porneia" here, the evil that is appealing. Don't. Seek virtue

<sup>10</sup> **Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters.** Don't be superficial in our love in the church. Let me tell you, as things get tougher for Christians in "this present evil age," so much hangs upon our having real love and concern for one another.

**Take the lead in honoring one another.** Let others know what blessings they are and encourage them in it.

<sup>11</sup> **Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord.** Our Christian life is to be deep and meaningful, keeping the Lord in mind and maintaining a Christian worldview. Our faith doesn't get our leftover energy, but we devote our energy to the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> **Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer.** Live life with an eternal perspective. No, you aren't going to be wealthy, you are going to struggle, but you have the certain hope of eternal riches, so we up with the crosses we bear.

He goes on: <sup>13</sup> **Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.** Nobody among us should go hunger, and all should feel welcome.

<sup>14</sup> **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.** That's what Jesus did. That's what he did when YOU were his enemy.

<sup>15</sup> **Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.** It's called empathy. Value what your brother or sister is going through and share it with them.

<sup>16</sup> **Live in harmony with one another.** It is more important that we live and work together harmoniously in this congregation than that we do things your way or mine.

So then ... **Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.** Don't think that you have the best ideas ever, that you have it all figured out and we would be well off if we all just listened to you.

Think about these virtues according to the way you live, and if you have been calculating how you compare to others, then again you haven't been listening. You aren't more acceptable to our Lord, because his love for you is based on what He gave you – His righteousness – and what He made you – His child.

You are forgiven, that you your hope.

This is the way that we live until all He has promised, our certain hope, is fulfilled.

AMEN.