

October 19, 2025

Paul Purdue preaching

Scientists have categorized somewhere around 160,000 different kinds of months. The four inch tulip-tree silk moth is part of the nearly 1 million varieties of insects in the world. A newborn baby Blue whale baby is 23 feet long and weighs 2 tons. It is one of the 1.5 million categorized species of animals in the world. As many animals as we have classified and named, scientists estimate there may be another 5-6 million underdiscovered animals hiding in remote rainforests and swimming in the deepest seas. Imagine Creation's variety from the Nashville crayfish to the California Condor to us, human beings, one single species. How many of the 73,000 different kinds of trees can you name or imagine? How is it that with 8 billion people on earth no two of us look exactly or act alike?

It appears God deeply values variety. Most artists do.

Writing to a deeply divided church Paul makes the point that God, our Creator, values diversity, variety and individuality.

*Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit,  
there are varieties of services but the same Lord,  
there are varieties of activities,  
but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.  
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

If we read a little further in the passage, we would read where Paul compares the church to different parts of the body, eyes, ears, nose, hands, feet... and tells us "*God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as (the Creator) chose.*"

Paul does not just mention different spiritual gifts, but the ways we serve, and the activities we are good at. Listen to the triplet...

*Varieties... the same Spirit,  
Varieties... the same Lord,  
Varieties... the same God  
who activates all of these gifts in everyone.*

Think of the people in your life. What gifts, services, and talents do you treasure in the beloved people in your life? Now widen the circle out to the gifts, services and abilities that we may not always remember to thank God for. Engineers designed and factory

workers made your phone, car, or coffee makers. Architects and carpenters who built your table or home. Farmers, meteorologists and truck drivers who help put breakfast on your table. Artists and poets who put a song in your step or hope in your heart. Pilots and mechanics who deliver a loved one to us safely. Doctors and pharmacists who keep us well. What a variety of gifts, services and activities God has sent into our lives through other people?

*It is the same God who gives, animates, and activates all of this in everyone. There is a manifestation of God's Spirit in each of us and God gives these gifts, services and activities to us for the common good.*

My uncle Clellon was about 6 foot five. In middle school my hoop dreams hinged on growing into those genes. I imagined tipping in the rebound to help Kentucky win a national championship, then my life could have been complete at 22. Why would that matter more than shooting baskets in my driveway with my best friends? I'm not sure when exactly I stopped wishing I was a little bit taller, but on Wednesday, I was unsure if my neck could bend enough to let me get in the backseat of a Prius.

But some things I grew up with were harder than being average height. I cried most school nights as I passed through the fourth grade for the first time, the second time was better. The letters my classmates mastered with ease looked like gibberish. I failed every spelling test despite hours spent doing homework at our dining room table. Today, my dyslexia brain will sometimes fumble a simple phrase: you have probably heard this while I was preaching, but I have learned to love my unorthodox brain.

Now it is important to acknowledge that there are deep pains in life. Every day, someone is touched by illness, disappointment, tragedy. Our baptismal liturgy reminds us that there is evil, injustice and oppression in our worlds that we vow to resist. Last week we explored the complexities of Jeremiah 29, where God shows up amid our suffering... *"I will bring you back... For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your shalom and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. I will hear you... you will find me... and I will restore you... bring you back home"*. Bad things happen. The cross tells us that God is so deeply identified with human suffering, that God incarnated the hurt and brokenness in the world. *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin."* (Hebrews 4:15) God created each of us as unique and beautiful.

look around and within

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there are varieties of services but the same Lord,  
there are varieties of activities,  
but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.  
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.  
For just as the body is one and has many members so it is with Christ.  
For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—  
Jews or Greeks, (male or female)- slaves or free—  
and we all share one cup in the Spirit.*

We sometimes struggle with our gifts. The market God's insatiable desire for more and more drives us to out-compete, out-shine, out-perform, out-think, out-dress, out-do, out-argue, out-virtue, and basically win out over everyone else. We struggle with this notion that every good thing God has given us is *"for the common good"*. This is nothing new. In chapter 1, Paul greets the Corinthians "with grace and peace from God" and introduces his scribal collaborator Sosthenes. The founding pastor follows with his usual *"thank yous"* directed to church Paul is writing to: *"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus"*. How might our conversations change if we began our conversations with thanksgiving for those we converse with? In his thanksgiving Paul is laying some groundwork to address the conflict within the Corinthian church, pointing out how *"in every way you have been enriched in God, in speech and knowledge of every kind... so that you are not lacking in any gift."* Paul is writing to people who seem to have it all, but to people who are deeply divided. By verse 10, Paul calls the Zoom Administrative Board to order: *"Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been made clear to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you"* Paul will go on to talk about jealousy, rivalries, camps and clans.

What does it mean to be of the same mind and purpose? What does unity look like? Could unity begin with a recognition of the variety of gifts in other people? How do we use the great variety of gifts, graces, talents, services and activities that we all have, not to compete with each other but to build each other up to create the common good? The same mind does not mean we see everything in the same way. Do poets and engineers look at a bridge in the same way? Do lawyers and architects see an abandoned building with the same lens? Could our thanksgiving for other people's unique gifts allow us to see God more clearly in other people?

Imagine the most beautiful tree you have ever seen...

Now imagine a world with just that one tree.  
 Imagine your favorite song  
 What if that was the only song in the world?  
 Or the world had only one good joke  
 Or every child turned out perfectly the same?

God has created us with a great variety of ways we can give, abilities we have to serve, and activities we can lead. God created this variety. God created us to see the world in different ways. .

300 years ago, John Wesley published a sermon called "Catholic Spirit. In it, Wesley references 1 Corinthians 13 noting that human disagreements arise because *"we know but in part"* Wesley continues *"it is an unavoidable consequence of our human understanding that we will see things in life and religion differently."* Wesley adds *"my belief is no rule for another"* then tells us he is uninterested in arguments over the details of faith. Wesley asked us, *"Is your heart right... If your heart is aligned with my heart, if you love God and love all humankind, I ask no more- give me your hand... love me and love all people."*

This morning 180 Belmonsters including most of our clergy folks are up at Beersheba for the All Church Retreat. As long as we can keep it to an hour, the highlight of the weekend is Saturday night's talent show. I love it when younger children muster up their courage enough to come to the microphone to play an instrument, tell a joke or make a paper airplane and fly into the roaring crowd. There is something magical about being in a talent show where there's no judgment, no competition, no trophies, only encouragement, laughter and love. There is something beautiful, transformational, about being in a room where everyone is rooting for you. Let us be those kinds of Christians, cheering others on.

Let us give thanks for all the different ways God created us. . We have different gifts, different perspectives, different ways to serve. Let us use our gifts to build each other up, cheer each other on and create together the common good. Amen.