

2nd Sunday after Epiphany Year C
1/16/2025

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

I speak to you today in the name of one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

What's the longest journey you've ever taken?

Maybe you've taken an international flight across the world; maybe you've gone on a long hike, even backpacking for days. I personally love a long road trip.

No matter your style of journey, one thing is certain: you need the right gear. Every road trip needs a vehicle, fuel, maps, food, water. Without these things, you're going nowhere; and even if you do get moving without proper supplies, you'll have a rough

trip, lost and hungry. But, equipped with good gear, you could be in for the adventure of a lifetime.

God's mission is like one of these long journeys. We have a destination: at the eschaton, the million dollar word for the end of time, God's infinite love will reconcile all the sin and injustice of our fallen world. The journey to reconciliation is already underway, begun in the very creation of the universe. That's a huge, incomprehensible scale of journey - really blows a little road trip out of the water!

But we can zoom in from the cosmic scale. The Christian church has been participating in God's mission for just 2,000 years. Let's zoom in even more. On November 1st, 1868, a school teacher and licensed Episcopal lay reader led an All Saint's service in a small house. That was the first service of St. Timothy's - our community in Herndon has been participating in God's mission for 156 years. Our little church's journey is the result of many lifetimes of Christian witness - people we've recorded in our histories, and people we will never know. People in this room right now.

In the coming months, we'll talk a lot about St. Tim's mission.

Next week is our annual meeting. We'll talk about where we've been, where we're going, and how we'll get there. Father Charles will share some exciting priorities for the new year, and we'll elect a slate of faithful, capable vestry members to lead.

We'll also hear about our mission abroad, as faithful partners with St. Mathieu's school in the Central Plateau region of Haiti, the poorest area of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

This year is also the 50th anniversary of St. Timothy's preschool, a vital mission right here in our neighborhood.

It's amazing what our church has, and will, accomplish. We are laborers in the field alongside God, empowered by the Holy Spirit's gifts.

How are you called to participate in God's mission? What are your spiritual gifts?

Let's turn to our scripture today from First Corinthians, chapter twelve: "concerning spiritual gifts."

Paul names a diversity of gifts bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit for the common good. And here they are: wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. That's a wide variety of gifts for a wide variety of people and purposes. But what I find most beautiful about this passage is what Paul is saying about the whole community in Corinth.

"There are varieties of gifts," says Paul, "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."

In other words, Paul celebrates the diversity of gifts present in the Corinthian church; he celebrates the diversity and reminds the community that these gifts must be used in common, working together, complementing each other, for the common good. The Spirit bestows a variety of gifts upon each of us. We, like the recipients of Paul's letter nearly 2,000 years ago, are called to exercise these gifts in a common mission. God's mission.

If God's mission is a long journey, the Holy Spirit's gifts are the gear, the supplies we need. Let's reflect, for a moment, with Paul.

What gifts has God given you? How has God shown up in your life, equipping you to work for the common good?

What gifts has the Spirit bestowed upon St. Timothy's?

What gifts has God given our neighbors?

These questions are worth asking throughout our lives. It's the work of discernment: praying and noticing God's gifts. Not just in ourselves, but in our communities. Once you notice the Holy Spirit working in your midst, you'd be surprised what incredible work we can accomplish together.

Because I'll tell you the truth: participation in God's mission is a really easy way to name an incredibly difficult task. God made us for a journey of love, repentance, sacrifice, and mercy. Quite often, God's way of love is the most difficult path to take. Spiritual gifts aren't just helpful for our journey; they are vital equipment, like fuel for your car on a roadtrip through the Great Plains. Speaking

from personal experience, you do *not* want to run out of gas on a solitary road far from civilization.

And here's another truth: there comes a point in all our lives together when, despite all the gifts from God, the abundance of gear, the call to mission is bigger than our capacity. We stumble. As individuals, as churches, as communities, we fall short. We run out of gas.

The church in Corinth was no different. Anglican scholar N.T. Wright jokes that "If there was one church that caused Paul to tear his hair out and made him age before his time, it was probably 'the church of God in Corinth.'" Paul planted this church, he loved them dearly; and we have two full letters in our New Testament dedicated to chastising them. Paul saw that the community took wrong turns; they were divided against themselves and acted immorally. They lost track of God's mission and started following their own. But he never gave up. Paul, their pastor, called them to account - because he had faith that no matter how far they went astray, our God of abundance gave them the spiritual gifts they needed to return to the mission.

When you reflect on the spiritual gifts God has given you, your friends, your neighbors, your church; when you compare our gear to the scale of God's mission for the whole creation, the task might seem insurmountable. The arc of justice is just too long. We are called in diverse ways to live for the common good, but so often division and hatred dominate instead.

When the going gets tough, when you run out of gas, hold on to Paul's hope.

Hold on to Mary's hope.

There was once a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and Jesus' mother was there. When the wine gave out, she said to Jesus, "They have no wine." One rather sassy exchange later, Jesus performed one of his most famous miracles: he turned water into wine, rescuing the party. And it's no two buck chuck, either. This was *good* wine. That's God's way. The going will get tough; the wine we ordered will run out; our road trip will come to a grinding halt in the middle of the wilderness. But that is never the end of the story. The Holy Spirit *will* show up - usually in a surprising way that

turns our expectations upside down. Who could have predicted Jesus' miracle in Cana? Hold on to hope.

Maybe you're running on empty right now. Maybe the world seems a bit too much like the church in Corinth: divided, selfish, with immorality running unchecked. If so, you come by those feelings honestly. There is real evil in the world, and it's difficult to fight for the good.

Remember that God's power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Know that desolation and emptiness, inadequacy and failure, are never the end. God's mission continues, and the Holy Spirit intervenes. Miracles really do happen. Gifts will appear in your life, in our lives together, that get us back on track. God will never, ever, abandon you. God will never, ever, abandon us.

When we participate in God's mission, we are never alone. God is with us; and we are with one another. The spiritual gifts of one person may seem insignificant, but when we join together, combining our gifts, by the grace of God, His kingdom will break through.

So, as another year begins in the life of our church and we discern together how we will participate in God's mission, let us pray together. Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to bestow upon each of us the gifts we need for the journey ahead. Let us pray for the strength to act upon those gifts, in our own lives, in our neighborhoods, in the world. Let us pray, above all, to travel faithfully, together, with Paul's and Mary's visions of hope.