

Hancock Next Phase 3 Small Group Discussions Session 2

**In the revolutionary spirit of our Christian faith
We invite you to join us as we
Walk our Spiritual Paths Together.....**

We walk our spiritual paths together, without judgment, honoring where each of us is in our journey, and supporting and encouraging each other along the way. Questions and doubts are welcome. Through lifelong learning we seek to feed the spiritual hunger in each of us with all that Christianity has to offer. We equip our children and youth with a foundation of faith and love that can adapt and sustain them as they grow.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Background:

The Christian journey is not meant to be the journey of the lone ranger. Throughout our Bible the pages call us always to be in community with others. Even the model of God as a trinity: God the Creator, Jesus the Redeemer, and the Spirit the Sustainer, is a model of relationship. In the gospels Jesus continually asks his disciples to love one another. In one of his last prayers before his death, he pleads with God to make his disciples and all of his followers “one.”

Today there is much said about those who check the box “spiritual but not religious.” While many of us can relate to having spiritual experiences in the woods, or seeing a sunset, or reading a beautiful poem, none of those things are a substitute for walking our spiritual path with one another. We have claimed the central importance of being sojourners together as part of our mission statement. We always seek to do this, and to help one another as we seek to grow spiritually.

The Text for Today:

The overarching theme of 1 Corinthians is a plea for unity in the church at Corinth. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in the early 50's CE. The letter is probably prompted by a delay in his return to see them. He knew that other church leaders were influencing them, and he wanted to assert his own influence as they were wrestling with what it meant to be a church. In this letter Paul's affection for the church at Corinth is evident. Paul is laying out a case for unity amidst their differences, while also not demanding total conformity. He pleads for unity while highlighting complementarity.

Paul introduces the image of the “body of Christ,” and lays out details as to how they should interact with one another. The church at Corinth was diverse (as were most early churches), including Judeans, Greeks, slaves and free people. Their differences were many, but their commitment to the way of Jesus bound them together, and created a love that allowed for space and grace to learn together.

Our passage is Paul’s explanation of spiritual gifts. Paul highlights:

- 1) we all have spiritual gifts,
- 2) these gifts are rarely the same,
- 3) each gift comes from God,
- 4) each gift is manifested for the “common good.”

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Let Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and 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. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Questions for Discussion:

Paul begins this chapter by making it clear that any one of them who is a part of the community has the Spirit of God in them. “Jesus is Lord,” is the earliest Christian confession of faith. The readers of the letter would have understood that this reference simply referred to any and all who had made a profession of faith. Any and all who had done that had the Spirit of God alive and well in them.

- 1) In what ways have you realized/remembered that you have the Spirit of God in you? In what ways have you realized/remembered that those with you here today do as well? How does it affect you to realize/remember this?

Paul then goes on to reiterate that all of the gifts come from the Spirit of God, who activates them in everyone. He then writes, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good?"

- 2) What does it mean to you that the *manifestation* of gifts have been given for the "*common good*?" What do you think happens if a gift ceases to be used for the common good? For example, what if a gift is used only for an exclusive group or for oneself? How do we know if we are allowing our gifts to be used for the common good?

Paul then lists a variety of gifts. This list is not meant to be exclusive. There are spiritual gifts that Paul does not list here, probably because he was focusing on what he knew of the spiritual gifts of the church at Corinth.

- 3) Do you believe that you have spiritual gifts given to you by God? If yes, do you have a sense of what some of those might be? If no, why not?
- 4) Can you think of a time when you felt like you were really using your gifts well and for the common good? What was that experience like for you? Have you ever tried to serve in an area that didn't use your gifts? Maybe because a job needed to be done, even if it wasn't your area of giftedness? What was that like?
- 5) Can you think of a time when you have seen someone else really using their gifts well and for the common good? How could you tell? What was your internal response to the use of their gifts? Have you wanted someone else's gifts, or wished yours were different?

Keep in mind the paragraph from the mission statement, found at the beginning of this session, when answering the following questions:

- 6) What does it mean to you for a church community to walk their spiritual paths together? Have you experienced this? If so please share.
 - Through education
 - Through community and caring for each other
 - Through worship
 - Through mission and justice opportunities
- 7) How can we at Hancock better use our gifts to walk our spiritual paths together?
 - Through education
 - Through community and caring for each other
 - Through worship
 - Through mission and justice opportunities