

### **Children's Moment Suggestions:**

Find and set up a Jenga game on a flat surface (other than carpet) in a place where all the children can gather around. (It's nice if you also make sure the congregation can see.) Tell the children that this Jenga game represents all the gifts of this congregation. Say: "See how they are all intertwined and connected? This is how our Christian community stays strong. Each disciple offering his/her gifts for the good of the whole. We don't always realize how connected we are, do we? How much we need one another? But watch what happens when we begin taking away some gifts."

One by one, begin pulling blocks and placing them beside the game. (Pull enough so the stack gets a little wobbly.) Ask: "What do you notice about our stack of gifts? That's right, it gets more and more fragile — like it is going to fall over. I share this with you to show how much we need one another and the gifts that each of us offers. What would happen if I put the blocks back? The whole thing is stronger, isn't it? As we shared last week, each of you is discovering that you have very important gifts and talents that you can share to make our Christian community stronger and more loving."

Let us pray,

**You gather us from our separate lives, Great God,  
to hear your word and respond to your revealing.  
You have appointed us for the work of your church.  
We seek your guidance, your wisdom, your way.  
Help us to perceive and understand your law,  
and then to follow you faithfully, as your people.  
Bind us together with you in worship,  
and transform us from distinct persons  
into the Body of Christ,  
alive with your Spirit in this place. Amen.**

This is our third week of our "Greater Gifts" sermon series. Today, we contemplate the many ways in which our gifts are interconnected. You'll recall we began this journey reflecting on God's gift to us in baptism — the beginning of our journey. Last week, we were invited to discover and activate the spiritual gifts that God has given us for our journey.

### **Sermon Notes:**

This past Monday, many celebrated the contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr., so I thought it would be appropriate in our discussion of the interrelatedness of our spiritual gifts if we began with one of his quotes:

"In a real sense all life is interrelated. All men [and women] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you

are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be . . . This is the interrelated structure of reality.”<sup>1</sup>

What does it mean to be interrelated? To be part of an inescapable network? Does that describe our church? Is that how we think about our gifts working together? Or does our church and its disciples operate more independently of one another?

(v12) “. . . all the members of the body, though many, are one . . .”

In the body of Christ, all of us and the gifts that we bring to the church are indeed interrelated. We cannot succeed in our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, unless we are working together, truly valuing and depending on the gifts that each disciple offers for the good of the whole.

(v14-17) “. . . the body does not consist of one member but of many.

. . . Because I am not a hand, I do not belong . . . not . . . any less a part of the body.

. . . Because I am not an eye, I do not belong . . . not . . . any less a part of the body.

. . . If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

. . . If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?”

In this mission, there is no room for ego, belittling, or looking down upon the gifts of others. When we are all working together to make and grow disciples, no task is less important than another.

Find a few examples to lift up to show how the many gifted disciples of your church work together toward the mission of making disciples. Pick a wide variety, just like the parts of the body from this passage, and explain their importance to the whole. From the nursery worker to the trustee chair to the worship director — think about and articulate how they contribute to the mission of making disciples.

(v19) “If all were a single member, where would the body be?”

(v21-22) “The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,”

nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

(v22) “On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,”

(v23) “and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect . . .”

Let's use our imagination for a moment and create a fictitious "neediness survey."

For the following statements, rate how much you agree or disagree. (1) if you disagree, (5) if you agree. Hold your hand up with the number. Be honest!

It is okay to need another person's help.

All that I need I can provide.

Don't ask me for help. I'll offer help when I can.

I would come close to death before I would consider asking for help.

It makes me uncomfortable to ask for help.

This thoroughly unscientific poll reveals a few possibilities:

We are uncomfortable being vulnerable.

We are uncomfortable asking for help.

We don't have extra time to help.

(v26) "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

When it comes to recognizing the interrelated nature of our gifts, we must come to terms with our own vulnerability and dependency; and we must declare that it is okay to need one another!

The reality is there are many parts of the body that aren't always functioning, and those parts often don't realize how it hurts the whole. This is not about guilt or telling you to do more. No, this is to say — with honesty and love — that we need you and we need one another. God has gifted you in ways that God has not gifted me. I need you to show up and share your gifts, because without your gifts, this body will not function the way it was meant to function. And isn't that our ultimate goal: to function the way God intends? To fulfill the call on our lives to be who God created us to be in the context of this community? The answer is "of course!" But there is one more piece of our "Greater Gifts" that we must consider. Come back next week as we seek that final and crucial piece.

Let us pray,

**Bless, O Lord, these gifts and offerings you have bestowed upon us,  
that they may be a sign of our intent to serve you.**

**Use them and us to bring good news to the poor,  
proclaim release to the captives,**

**and bring wholeness and healing to all who are hurting and oppressed.**

**If one of your people suffers, we all suffer;**

**but if one of your people is honored, we all rejoice together,**

**in your name. Amen.**

## **Benediction**

Go your way, united as one Body  
and rejoicing in the fulfillment of God's word among you.

We do not all have the same gifts,  
but we are blessed to be able to share what we have  
with one another and with all creation.

May the joy of the Lord be your strength this day, and every day. **Amen**