

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David Powers
Sunday, May 31, 2026

As we prepare to hear God's word read and proclaimed, I invite you to get comfy in your seats in your pews there. Take whatever prayer posture feels most comfortable for you. Let's take a couple deep breaths together. So, let's take a deep breath in and breathe it out slowly.

Another deep breath in

and breathe it out slowly.

Breathe in God's mercies

and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. And so we pray that you would dwell within us and around us in these moments, that you would by your power quiet any voice within us but your own, that we might hear your word for us this day and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

So this morning we celebrate Trinity Sunday. This is a day when we wrestle with the mystery of the threeness and the oneness of the God that we know in Parent and in Son and in Holy Spirit. We'll do so using Paul's words from his letter to the church in Corinth. This first letter we're going to read from chapter 12:verses 4-12. This language that we'll hear this morning is not just spirit-based. This is often a Pentecost reading. It's not just spirit-based, but I want you to pay attention to the way in which the triune God shows up in this text. Jesus as Lord, God our parent, as God, and of course, the Spirit. So, let's listen together for God's word to each of us and indeed to God's church.

Now, there are a variety of gifts, but the same spirit. And there are a variety of services but the same Lord. And there are a variety 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 the spirit of the utterance of wisdom. 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 powerful deeds. To another prophecy. To another the discernment of spirits. To another various kinds of tongues and to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by the one and the same spirit who allots to each one individually just as the

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spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So friends, we do not have to look far to know that we live in the midst of a season of unease and overwhelm. Political chaos, economic uncertainty, headlines, algorithms designed to unsettle us. Division seems to be everywhere. It's easy to feel in the midst of the dynamics of our current state a sense of smallness, powerlessness, anxiousness, as though history is happening to us. There is little that we can do about it. The Stoics knew something about this feeling. Marcus Aurelius governed during a plague, during war, during instability, political turmoil. Yet he had counsel that was surprisingly practical to those who were living at the same time. To paraphrase, "Stop being obsessed over what you cannot control and do the good that is yours to do." In *Meditations*, he says, "At dawn, when you have trouble getting out of bed, tell yourself, I have to go to work as a human being." Aurelius is arguing that purpose is found in action. In a disordered world, one resists despair not by trying to control everything but by doing the next right thing, doing the work that belongs to them. In *First Corinthians*, Paul echoing in some ways this wisdom, he reframes this conviction theologically. He says that the work of those who belong to the body of Christ is the "faithful use of spirit given gifts for the common good." "The faithful use of spirit given gifts for the common good." Paul says to the early church in Corinth, trying to figure out what it looks like to navigate a complex world, he says, "God has already given you gifts for exactly this time and for the purposes of God."

For the Corinthians, their outside world was chaotic as well, living under empire, social and economic inequality and instability. That was outside their walls. Inside their walls was a different sort of fragmentation. These folks were fighting over status within the church. Specifically, they were fighting about spiritual gifts. They understood spiritual gifts more like a spiritual competition. They were overvaluing, commentators will tell us, they were overvaluing the speaking of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Many commentators will say that's why Paul puts those particular gifts last in this list. They were treating spiritual gifts like trophies rather than tools. So Paul offers them a correction. "There are a variety of gifts but the same spirit." So that the question becomes not who has the most impressive gift but instead what gift has God entrusted to you to be used for the good of others. Paul wants the Corinthians to know that spiritual gifts are not badges of importance. They are responsibilities of love.

He seems to be telling them that when life feels chaotic, do not withdraw, do not catastrophize or offer endless commentary. Instead, in verse 7, he says this, "To each is given the manifestation of

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the spirit for the common good to each.” There is not one in that gathering in Corinth that will hear this letter read to whom Paul is not speaking. Every one of them got up early in the morning and got dressed accordingly for worship and came and sat in a seat only a little bit different than the one that you are sitting in this morning. Every one of them is being addressed by this letter that he writes to the church. “The spirit has given you gifts,” he says to them, “Every single one of you.” Not only to pastors, not only to elders and deacons, but to each. Maybe your gift is leadership. Maybe it's generosity. Maybe it's compassion. Maybe it's wisdom. Maybe it's listening. Maybe it's administration, hospitality, encouragement, teaching. Each of you, whatever the gift, has one, and it is to be used.

And Paul is imploring the Corinthians to recognize that the path through chaos is not control. It is contribution to the common good.

I love Laura Vanderamp's way of putting it. “Believing that your actions matter is how the human mind learns hope. When the world feels chaotic, God does not call us to paralysis or panic, but to participation in the body. And the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that the Holy Spirit gives each of us a gift, not for ourselves, but for the common good.”

If you're joining us for the first time this morning, and I see some visitors out there, we are going to do something a little bit special. We're ordaining and installing new officers as Whitney told our children. We understand that there are offices within the body of Christ, specifically deacons and elders. In Idlewild, deacons are called to the ministry of care and elders are called to governance. These are the different gifts. And yet, we believe that these are unique callings and gifts, but these leaders are not more spiritual than anyone else here. They are simply people who have said yes to a particular responsibility within the body. So if you are sitting there thinking this sermon is not for you, it is. Today is not about ordained gifts. It is about shared gifts. The body only works because the different parts belong to each other and work together for the common good. The reason we chose the image of the body this morning on this Trinity Sunday is because Paul speaks often about the relatedness of hands and feet, of eyes and ears. Later he'll implore the church and tell them that there is not one part of the body that is of lesser importance than another. We cannot divorce ourselves from the varied gifts that each of us are given. Each of these gifts work together. They relate to each other. And that's why this particular image is perfect for us on Trinity Sunday, because what we claim as those who follow in the way of the Reformed Tradition is that in the Trinity, God's own relationality is revealed to us. Father, Son, and Spirit, mutually giving to one another, deeply related. You actually can't understand God unless you understand the interconnectedness and relationship of all of us, each to the other; and

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the church is to reflect this divine life, where we stop asking who matters most and we start asking how can I serve?

The reality is that we can't control Washington, we cannot control every headline or part of our feed, every conflict or fear. But we can ask a question. What gift has God given to you, to me? And how is God calling us to use those gifts for the common good here and now?

I was driving, I had just gotten done working on Friday afternoon, driving on Sam Cooper and the Idlewild bus flew past me. I was confused. I tried to get up beside it. It took a little bit of extra pedal to the metal, but I couldn't see who was driving it. So, I texted Tangia, our Director of Operations here. She shared with me that it was a volunteer from Room in the Inn, an Idlewilder, who was transporting, using the church bus as transport for a mattress, moving it from our church here to another church where it was needed to give comfort to someone who needed a roof over their head.

I thought to myself, "I could have offered my pickup truck instead of the church van." And yet, there was something beautiful about the idea that somehow a mattress was stuffed sideways into a passenger van and driven across our city just so someone could rest more comfortably.

There's something beautiful also about the idea that almost every Thursday we are able to give shelter to women and their children who are in need of care.

This morning as you leave this place, you'll pass by a table that has some of these on it. This is our summer semester guide fresh off the press. If you open the front cover, page two has a list. Well, actually, I don't want to skip over. Page one is worship and music. You should come to worship every week, and you should sing in the summer choir. But page two, page two. Page two is a list of opportunities for you to use the gifts that God has given you for the common good. We have a new Director of Outreach. She started just a couple weeks ago. Her email, Trisha's email, is there at the bottom. Here's what I want to challenge you with this morning. I want you to go home, and I want you to spend some time looking at these outreach ministry offerings and asking God how you might be called to one or more than one of these. "What are the gifts, Holy Spirit, that you have gifted to me, that you are now calling me to use here and now?"

Here's what I know. The way I learn hope is by knowing and believing that your actions matter in our church, to our community, and in the world. And we cannot be the church unless each of us is using the gifts that God has given to us. Some of us have a little bit of extra time. Some of us have a little bit of extra money. Some of us have a little bit of extra love. Others of us have the

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ability to be cheerful early on a Sunday, and we can extend hospitality. Others of us have a devoted prayer life, and we can commit to our community prayer ministry. There are just countless ways that we can be the body together. I want to posit to you this morning that the Spirit's answer to chaos is not despair. It is people, ordinary people, just like the Corinthians, just like you, using ordinary gifts with extraordinary faithfulness for the common good.

Just as the body is many and yet all one. Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body that though many are one body, so it is with Christ, and so it is with you and so it is with the church. So go home today and think about how you are being called to contribute to the building up of the body for the common good, because the spirit has gifted you.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.