

One Spirit of Love: 1 *Corinthian 12:1-14*

Norwalk Christian Church, January 20, 2019, Year C, 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

We are in the midst of the season of Epiphany, a season where we focus on the presence of Christ in our world. But in New Orleans, where we lived with Finn was born, Epiphany is more than a season in the church calendar. It's carnival season--Mardi Gras! And that means, several times every week in the weeks leading up to Fat Tuesday, there are parades.

Now, I know. Everyone has their stereotypes of what these parades are like. And, well, yes, some of them are like that. But the vast majority of them are just good parades. Awesome floats. People throwing candy and toys to kids. And there are always bands. Lots of bands. Marching bands!

Every middle school and High School in the area has a marching band. And these bands are incredible. They will walk for miles in parade after parade playing song after song. And every one of these bands always has someone in front, someone in the lead, called the drum major.

The drum major not only directs the band and keeps the beat, but they do it while walking backwards the whole parade route. It's quite impressive. They may not be playing any instruments at that moment, but they are charged with holding the whole band together.

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, a day where we remember the pastor and activist Rev. Dr. King and his fight for justice. And one of his most famous sermons was the Drum Major Instinct, preached in Atlanta, Georgia on February 4th, 1968, almost exactly 51 years ago, and *exactly* one month before he was murdered at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee.

That sermon was quoted in his eulogy. As I thought of those parades in New Orleans during Epiphany, and those drum majors leading marching band after marching band, I thought of Dr. King's words.

In the sermon, he talks about the Drum Major Instinct within us all--the need to be the one leading the parade. The one out front. The one who is seen as most important. "We all want to be important," Dr. King preached, "[We want] to surpass others, to achieve distinction, to lead the parade...this quest for recognition, this desire for attention, this desire for distinction is the basic impulse, the basic drive of human life, this drum major instinct."

But if you've ever been a part of a band (and I haven't but I've heard people talk), you know--not everyone can be the drum major. If everyone is leading, there is no one playing music.

The drum major maybe out front, but if there is no band, or if the band doesn't want to follow, their leadership doesn't matter. For the marching band to entertain in the parade, you need drum majors and a band--everyone playing and marching in synch.

In our scripture reading today, the Apostle Paul is writing to a church in the city of Corinth. And this church is a mess! They disagree. They fight. I've seen some churches with disfunction, but nobody beats the dysfunction of First Christian Church of Corinth.

To this dysfunctional church, Paul starts talking about spiritual gifts, because these Christians are fighting over who has the greatest spiritual gifts. It's like members in a marching band, fighting over who has the best instrument.

Paul tells them that all their gifts--all the things you are good at, from basic talent to miraculous gifts that they apparently shared in, like speaking in tongues and prophecy--all these things are good. But in and of themselves, they are insufficient.

No one gift is better than another--all are needed. And no matter your gifts, Paul says, we all share in the same spirit. The gifts all come from the same place, God's spirit. There are varieties of gifts, but one spirit. Varieties of services, but one Lord.

God gives us all the spirit for the common good--so that we can make a difference in the world in our own unique way.

And as I read this, I thought of those bands. Different instruments. Different levels of talent. Yet all marching to one beat. Playing one piece of music. Some on the trombone and some on the drums. Some as the drum major and some on the Saxophone. Each one, by themselves, would not be the same. No one could hear the song with just one trumpet marching alone. But with the whole band playing, the song is heard, and the crowd can feel the music and they start stomping their foot to the beat.

Last week Marti shared with us about Jesus' baptism, and challenged us all to remember our own baptisms. When we are baptized, we are told we are baptized into Christ. That is, baptism is a sign of our union with Christ.

But it's more than that. When we are baptized, we are also baptized into the church. It's not just about you and Christ, it's about you and Christ's church.

Because being a Christian isn't a solo act. Yes, you can love God all by yourself. And yes, you believe in God and worship God and feel God's presence, all by your lonesome,

alone in nature, praying at home, reading a book. But if you want to be a part of what God is doing in the world; if you want to really feel the presence of God alive in this world--you need to join a church.

Church is where the music happens. Church is where God's Spirit lives, the Apostle Paul says. And in church, it's not about who is up front, the drum major, leading the band. It's about everyone. Everyone has a role to play.

There are many members, but one body. Many instruments, but one band. And if you've been baptized, you've been baptized into the church--and you have a role to play.

Over the last few weeks, we've been offering what we call "an invitation". It's an invitation to make your commitment to our church public, and to officially join our church if you haven't already.

A couple weeks ago, Randy and Lisa Bates officially joined our church after already being active in this community for over a year. And Randy joked, that he was only doing it so he could get a nametag. And we officially have your nametag, by the way, Randy, and I want to give it to you now!

But you know what--Randy and Lisa--being a part of a church is about more than just a name tag and recognition--I know you know this. But you know that being a part of a church is about stepping up and playing your role, too.

Because everyone here--everyone--believe it or not, no matter how talented you may think you are, no matter what you may believe you have to give--everyone, every member of this church, has a role to play. You are needed.

We need you to be a part of this church, but not just to be a part, but to play your part.

To step up and use your spiritual gift. Because your gift is yours--uniquely yours. It's your role to play, your instrument, and no one can play it like you. But here's the catch--we can't fully, as a church, achieve our mission if everyone isn't playing their role.

So I want to make two challenges to you today: first, if you've been thinking about joining our church officially, I challenge you to make that commitment before the end of this month. And, second, no matter how long you've been a part of this church, a few weeks or a few decades, I challenge you to always play your role.

Maybe it's helping in the nursery or Sunday School, maybe it's singing. Maybe it's greeting visitors or serving on the board. Maybe it's teaching English to refugees. Maybe it's telling others about your faith and your church community. Maybe it's being a part of AMOS and talking to your legislators about the issues that matter to families, maybe it's volunteering at our public schools or backing goodies for coffee fellowship or picking

up litter on city streets or fostering kittens or writing notes or stitching prayer shawls or just praying for people you know need prayers.

There is something everyone can do and should do and must do! Not all of us can be the drum major--out front leading the parade. But, you know what, the world has enough drum majors. What we really need is people playing in the band--every one, playing and spreading the love and joy of Christ--everyone of us, joining in that fight for justice that Dr. King fought for, that fight for the common good that Spirit empowers us to,

And in this march for justice, there will be many members and many different gifts, some out front and some behind the scenes, some seemingly big and some seemingly small--but all of us are one body, and we all march together in one spirit of love.

We're about to sing a new song that Jenni is going to lead for us, One Spirit of Love. It's one of my favorites. The refrain sings: "Many gifts, One Spirit of Love, One Spirit of Love."

Dr. King played his role. He led a march for justice. But that march needed marchers. It took everyone to change the course of history. What are we called to do? What are you called to do? Small or large--you have a critical role to play. You have a gift! And marching together, we can change the world.

Let us share in and sing of that One Spirit of Love.