

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-- what is good and acceptable and perfect.

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,

5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith;

7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;

8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Matthew 16:13 He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.

14 Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit."

15 But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us."

16 Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding?"

17 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?

18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.

19 For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

20 These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

Loving Creator, shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words that I may speak, give us ears that we may hear and through your Holy Spirit help us understand.

Amen.

I don't know how many of you have seen the TV show Monk. It is a favorite for Jodi and I. Monk is a detective. He is also germ-a-phobic, afraid of heights, and milk, and the dark, and lots of other things, and he is obsessive compulsive.

When he shakes hands with anyone, he needs a disinfectant wipe from his assistant. If he has to open a car door he uses his sleeve. All the labels in his house need to face the same direction. And he will do things so they add up to ten.

In one episode he keeps moving a car to get the odometer to reach zero, and in another he complains because an alarm clock is set for 7:55 instead of 8 o'clock.

One time he traveled to Mexico where they don't have any of his favorite bottled water, Sierra Spring, and he nearly dies of dehydration because he won't drink any other brand.

He is barely able to function in the real world without significant support.

Take him to a crime scene, however, and things change. He notices everything, the smallest detail jumps out at him. In one episode he is on the set of a TV show, and when a show is filmed it is crucial that every detail is the same from scene to scene.

There are many examples of this. In Top Gun as a character is lifted up in the air he has no sunglasses, as he comes down he has glasses on. In Oceans Eleven one character is holding a glass with shrimp in it, and turns around and the glass becomes a plate and then it becomes a glass again.

In this episode of Monk, he watches one scene, and, as they make a second take, he points out a half a dozen changes. He sees stuff most people would miss. He is often asked about this and he says: it's a gift and a curse.

The show is patterned after perhaps one of the most popular detectives of all time, Sherlock Holmes who was also aware of the smallest details while also being pretty challenged by the normal world.

Many people with great gifts in one area are lacking in others. Michael Phelps, who captured the collective American imagination recently by winning an unprecedented 8 gold medals at the Olympic games has a great gift for swimming. But he also has his own challenges. He has ADHD attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which makes it hard for him to do many of the things most people would consider normal. It is similar to ADD the same thing without the hyperactivity piece, something from which I suffer.

People often talk about what is normal, and I have come to see that there really is no such thing. There are people who are better able to do the things expected by society, but normal is a very relative term.

Some people are able to organize large projects and are unable to speak in public. Some can't balance a checkbook but love to visit with others. Some can clean until everything is spotless but can't find their way from here to the grocery store, or find their car when they come out. I'm sure some of you have done that, lost your car once you got to the store. Maybe you couldn't even leave for the store till you found the keys.

Our daughters are a funny pair. Lindseigh was a straight A student, salutatorian of her high school class, finished 2 degrees in 4 years with honors. Gio had trouble dealing with school, never went to college, studied cooking, and enjoys taking her time with things.

When Lindseigh had her first child, it was clear that she needed help. Little Walker could take her in two out of three falls by the time he was a year old. She had met her match. She was very happy when she was able to go back to work!

Gio began babysitting for her little nephew, and it was clear that she was designed for this task. What began as a once a week thing has become a fulltime job as Gio is now the nanny for her nephew and her new niece, Lola. Lindseigh could not manage without the gifts of her little sister.

Paul understood this reality that we are all gifted in different ways.

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”

Can you imagine if we were all the same? If everyone in the congregation was gifted in the same way we would be in big trouble. If everyone liked managing money, we would have nobody organizing the work of the church, or taking care of the building, or visiting those who need visits. If everyone liked taking care of the building, there would be nobody to pray, or read scripture, or get the Nomads trips together, or welcome visitors.

Paul was wise enough to see that we all have different gifts and those are the gifts that God has given us, not for our own, but to share so the body of the church would be stronger.

As Paul writes to the church in Rome, he knew how people can be. One person is good at decorating the catacombs, and that person feels like they are the most important, and someone else is good at distributing Christian literature to slaves, and they think they are the most important, and a third is good at preaching and feels like that is the most important thing in the community. Paul wants us to not take ourselves too seriously. We should not think of ourselves as being more important than anyone else, because it takes many parts to make a whole body.

Paul’s advice to the Romans is good advice for any church. We are a diverse group of people, and that is part of what makes us useful to God. That is who we are in the church; we are Christ’s body, here to serve, and to worship, and to praise our God. That is who we called to be by the living God who wants us to be one body.

Jesus did not bring people together into the church so we could pat ourselves on the back because we are so good. That is how the Pharisees acted.

In today's Gospel reading, a continuation of last week's reading, Jesus is telling us that it is what comes from our hearts that is most important. It is not simply doing certain things, it is not following the correct dietary codes, or wearing the proper clothing, or praying the right prayers that will make us worthy in God's eyes. What will please or displease God is what comes from our hearts.

We are called into the church to allow our true selves to thrive and to shine. We are called into the church use our true gifts.

How many of you are gifted?

You may not be a gifted swimmer winning lots of medals.
You may not be a gifted detective solving crimes by seeing clues everyone else misses.
You may not be gifted to be normal, whatever that is,
But you are gifted.
You may or may not be gifted in prophecy,
You may or may not be gifted as a teacher,
You may or may not be gifted in exhortation,
You may or may not be gifted in generosity or compassion, but you are gifted in some way.

Every one of you is gifted; God has given you a gift to use to make the body of Christ stronger.

What comes from your heart, from the core of your being, is the most important thing to God. When you allow your gifts to bless the body of Christ, you are praising the one who gave you those gifts.

So who is gifted?
Are you? Are you?

When we share our gifts here in this community we make the church stronger. And we should not think that our gifts are anything special, they are just part of a whole body. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he says:

**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?
But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 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."**

We are one body.

How will you allow your gifts to praise God and to make this church stronger?

To God be all the glory.
AMEN.