

SEASON AFTER EPIPHANY 2019, PART I: GREATER GIFTS

SERIES OVERVIEW

We have chosen to divide the season after Epiphany this year into two complementary series designed to equip congregations to “see all the people.” The first series focuses upon lifting up the gifts in the community and strategically acting together as one body with many interconnected parts. This body, then, works as a cohesive unit to reach out beyond the walls of the church and bring people to know and receive the love of God.

The season after Epiphany almost always begins with a transitional Sunday—Baptism of the Lord—in which we encounter the narrative of Jesus’ baptism and John’s very dramatic description of baptism in Jesus’ name. The voice of God rings from heaven at Jesus’ baptism: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Lk. 3:22, NRSV). When we are baptized or gathered at the baptism of others, how do we hear God’s voice affirming each new member of God’s family? The second week contains Paul’s description of spiritual gifts—how the Spirit works in and through them and how we are gifted for being a part of the body of Christ with one another. A little bit of explanation is needed around the theme for week three, “Being Needy”: This phrase has a certain negative connotation that often relates to people who require a little more attention than others (we all likely know people like this). We would like to redeem the meaning by asserting that we all, regardless of our own gifts, need one another in order to be part of the whole body of Christ. The purpose of all these gifts is revealed in week four, in which the whole point of acting together is revealed—“having love,” which is the most important of the “marks of the new birth” (faith, hope, and love), as shared by both the apostle Paul and John Wesley.

Since this season takes place at the beginning of a new calendar year, it may be a helpful practice for your church to assess the spiritual gifts in your congregation. If you are looking for a spiritual gifts inventory that can help your church realize its potential in ministry, you can find resources here:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/new-church-starts/spiritual-gifts>

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/diy-tools-for-spiritual-gifts-discernment-and-ministry-deployment>

Week 1: Baptism of the Lord
[Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#)

January 13

You Are Beloved

Week 2: Second Sunday after the Epiphany 1 Corinthians 12:1-11	January 20	Gifted for Others
Week 3: Third Sunday after the Epiphany 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a	January 27	Being Needy
Week 4: Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany 1 Corinthians 13:1-13	February 3	Love

*All scripture quotations are NRSV.

GREATER GIFTS
EPIPHANY 1: YOU ARE BELOVED
Baptism of the Lord, Year C
January 13, 2019

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

See full texts, artwork, and *Revised Common Lectionary Prayers* for this Sunday at [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
Para obtener más recursos leccionario, [Estudios Exegéticos: Homiléticos](#).

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Calendar Notes

January

- January 1 [New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)
- January 6 [Epiphany Sunday/Epiphany](#)
- January 13 [Baptism of the Lord](#)
- January 11 [Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)
- January 20 [Human Relations Day](#)
- January 20 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)
- January 21 [Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)
- January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

February

- All Month* [Black History Month](#)
- February 2 **Presentation of the Lord/Candlemas**
- February 10 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#)
- February 18 [Presidents Day \(USA\)](#)

March

- March 1 [World Day of Prayer](#)
- March 3 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)
- March 6 [Ash Wednesday](#), and [Lent Begins](#)
- March 31 [UMCOR Sunday](#)

Planning for This Series

On this Baptism of the Lord Sunday, we are launching a new worship series. The series “Greater Gifts” starts with the Luke text today, and then follows the epistle readings from 1st Corinthians for the next three weeks. The title for this week is “You Are Beloved,” pulling from the language in John 3:22.

In 2016, Taylor Burton-Edwards noted that

“Baptism of the Lord is one of the four named days in our *Book of Worship* recommended for celebrating services of the baptismal covenant (Easter, Pentecost, and All Saints are the others). See *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 84.

“There are several options for liturgies you may use, depending on what you will be doing this day. If you are baptizing, reaffirming, **and** receiving new professing members, use [Baptismal Covenant I as revised by the 2008 General Conference](#). If you are only reaffirming, use [Baptismal Covenant IV as revised by the 2008 General Conference](#) or the more interactive version celebrated at the 2008 General Conference ([English](#), [Spanish](#)). And if you are baptizing infants or others not becoming professing members and reaffirming, but not receiving new professing members, you may use [this adaptation](#) of the 2008 General Conference service designed for persons not answering for themselves. And if there are some baptized persons whose sponsors have moved or died, and you need a way to bless new sponsors who take up this role today, use the appropriate additional material found in [A Service of Reaffirmation for New Sponsors](#).”

So you may consider adding a reaffirmation of baptism to your liturgy today. Even if you do not add a liturgical aspect of baptism to your service, consider Burton-Edward’s advice regarding the worship space: “Be sure the font is visibly central in your worship, that it is full of water, that you use water abundantly either in baptism or reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant. If you have a Paschal Candle, light it today and place it by the font.” You may decide to take a hymn focused on baptism or the gifts of the gathered community and make it a musical focal point for the series. Whatever you do, make it intentional and focused on the gifts of the church as the baptized body of Christ, before launching into the next series, #SeeAllThePeople, which is all about getting the people out of the church and into the community.

PREACHING NOTES

Sermon Notes and Suggestions for Baptism of the Lord Sunday Week 1, The First Gift: Grace for Us

[Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#)

This is the first week of our “Greater Gifts” sermon series, and today we will be exploring how baptism, as a “first gift” from God, leads us in life toward paths of discovering and rediscovering God-given gifts, activating those gifts through the Holy Spirit, understanding how our gifts are interrelated to the gifts of other disciples in the body of Christ, and how important it is to stay true to the heart of our God-given gifts — the love of God in Christ.

Week 1: The First Gift, Grace for Us	Baptism of the Lord (Jan 13)
Week 2: Discovering & Activating Our Gifts	Second Sunday after Epiphany (Jan 20)
Week 3: Interrelated Gifts, Being Needy	Third Sunday after Epiphany (Jan 27)
Week 4: The Heart of Our Gifts	Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (Feb 3)

For this first week, consider moving from the sermon into a service for reaffirming baptism: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/new-service-of-reaffirmation-of-the-baptismal-covenant>

- At the end of this service, invite those who have been baptized to come forward to touch the water from the baptismal font, perhaps making the sign of the cross on their foreheads, while the pastor offers: “Remember that you are baptized and rejoice!”
- Invite those who have never been baptized to come forward for prayer with leaders of the church. Train leaders to pray with those who come forward, asking the leaders to make a note if individuals indicate that they would like to be baptized. Perhaps build in time during the second Sunday of this series for these new baptisms.
- Although we touch on some elements of this service in the sermon notes, if you choose not to incorporate the service of reaffirming baptism, we suggest you familiarize yourself with the service and highlight important elements from your perspective.

Children’s Moment Suggestions:

Gather children around the baptismal font and explain what a font is (piece of furniture, place for holding baptismal water). Indicate that this is not like any old piece of furniture, but it is to be treated with great respect. It holds the water that we use for baptisms, and

it is to be treated with great care. Invite the children to touch the water as you reflect with them.

- What do we use water for? (answers such as cooking, cleaning, washing . . .)
 - Connect to: Newness of life, forgiveness when we mess up — to wash clean
- Invite them to look around at the congregation. Explain that many of the people here were baptized with water, some from this very font; some were just babies when their parent or guardian brought them to be baptized.
 - Connect to: In our baptisms, we recognize that we belong to Christ's church — this community of disciples— here to love and support you as you grow as a disciple
- Some elements you may want to lift up about baptism:
 - God's grace and love is available to all
 - Baptism is God's gift to us, offered to us without price. (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, page 33).
 - You could talk about what a gift is; then ask the children why they think God gives us this gift of baptism.

Sermon Notes:

(v.15) "As the people were filled with expectation . . ."

The people in Israel were waiting for a Messiah, a king, who would right the wrongs of their current reality and restore Israel. Many were gathering to be baptized by John in expectation that something would soon happen — the Messiah was coming.

Since this series falls just after the Christmas season, a good place to start might be to reflect on the expectations each of us has around Christmas. Think back to when you were a child. What expectations did you have? How are they different as an adult? As a child, what gifts did you expect to get? What was the excitement like around receiving gifts? At what point did you have equal excitement about giving gifts?

(insert your story here) I remember the joy of Christmas morning —seeing and opening all the gifts around the Christmas tree. I remember immediately wanting to go and tell my best friend Kevin and to see what he had received. It was never a competition. It was simply joy, delighting in each other's gifts.

As I remember, there was an initial joy when I first received the gift; but I remember receiving even more joy when I shared the gift with Kevin. When was the last time you received something and you could not wait to tell someone? An engagement ring? A new car? Often the full joy of the gift is not fully realized until you finally tell someone.

(insert your example here) My friend and his wife recently found out that they were pregnant, and they were being cautious in the first couple months until they knew things

were progressing well. They had told their parents, and his wife had told a close friend; and my friend was trying to figure out whom he could tell. His wife said, “Why don’t you tell Jeff”? I received the call from my friend, and I could tell that he was bursting at the seams with excitement. The sharing of this good news, this gift, completed his joy.

So what about this gift of baptism?

Some of you may have never been baptized. Later in the service, we want to give you an opportunity to sign up to be baptized next week if you feel God calling. Some of you were baptized more recently; some recently confirmed the baptism of your childhood; and for some, perhaps it has been many years since your baptism.

What do you remember leading up to that moment? Or, what did your parents or guardians tell you about that moment? Who was present? What did it mean to them?

(insert your story here) I was eight years old. We were singing the closing hymn, and the pastor invited all who heard Jesus calling them to come forward. I told my parents I wanted to go and slipped out of the pew and walked down the aisle. I was the only one. While the congregation finished the hymn, the pastor knelt down and asked me why I had come forward. I told him I wanted to follow Jesus my whole life and I thought it should start with being baptized. In those moments, the sanctuary became a thin space. The heavens did not open, but I felt God’s presence all around. As Wesley said, “my heart was strangely warmed.” On January 9, 1983, I received the gift of baptism and was forever changed. As a matter of fact, I remember telling my good friend Kevin about the experience right away. He was also a Christian, and he told about his experience of baptism, showing me a silver cross around his neck. In our young friendship, our faith was not something we talked about. In that moment, we shared God’s gift to us, and our joy was complete.

(15) . . . all were questioning in their hearts . . .

At the same time, the people gathered were questioning whether or not John the Baptist was the messiah. (16) John answered all of them by . . . (pointing to Jesus)

Much of my experience around baptism remains a mystery, a mystery that God continues to help unravel question by question in my life. What I have learned is that God was always there and always will be there for me. In the Wesleyan tradition, we call this prevenient grace — a grace that goes before us. A loving God is constantly reaching out, wanting to be at the center of our lives. And although we might still have questions, we are directed to Jesus, just as John directed those gathered who were seeking a Messiah.

At some point, each of us usually craves more — a deeper understanding of life and our purpose in it. Sometimes we feel God calling, and we feel a deep need to respond. It is different for each of us. For some, there is a distinct moment that we can recall and point to. For others, it might be a series of moments over time, drawing us closer and closer to God.

Baptism is a moment when we clearly see a gift held in outstretched loving arms, and we say yes. Through this gift, we find newness of life, union with Christ, God’s Spirit filling our lives, and true belonging to Christ’s community.

Baptism is a moment when we hear for the first time a small voice of God saying, “I love you. You are my son. You are my daughter. I will love you forever.”

Most describe during this moment a different feeling flowing through us — that’s grace — that’s God’s Spirit — that’s love. And from that moment on, we are forever changed, placed on a path following Jesus.

(21) Now when ALL the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying,

(21) the heaven was opened.

(22) and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.

(22) . . . And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.

Amen.

Next Sunday, if there are any who come forward wanting to be baptized, we will celebrate at the beginning of the service, and then we will explore the passage from [1 Corinthians 12:1-11](#)—next steps in how we discover and activate God-given gifts.

Series Writer: Jeff Campbell serves as the Executive Director of Conference Relationships at Discipleship Ministries. In this role, he connects with conference leadership to strengthen intentional disciple-making across the connection. Jeff is an ordained elder of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference and served churches in NJ prior to coming to Discipleship Ministries. He received his undergraduate degree in English, Linguistics, and Speech from the University of Mary Washington and his Master of Divinity degree from Drew Theological School.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[21st Century Worship Resources for the First Sunday After the Epiphany, Year C](#)

[Baptism of the Lord](#)

[Resources in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*](#)

[21st Century Worship Resources for Epiphany 1C](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Resources for Human Relations Day/Martin Luther King, Jr. Day](#)

[Beloved Child, Beloved Community \(hymn\)](#)

[Celebrating the Life of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads

GREATER GIFTS
EPIPHANY 2: GIFTED FOR OTHERS
Second Sunday After the Epiphany, Year C
January 20, 2019

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

See full texts, artwork, and *Revised Common Lectionary Prayers* for this Sunday at [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
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Planning for This Series

This is the second week in our “Greater Gifts” series, “Gifted for Others.” This week, the texts from 1st Corinthians extol the many diverse gifts of those in the Corinthian community. Taylor Burton-Edwards explains it,

”Paul reminds the community at Corinth that neither their common life nor their individual progress in Christ is about them and “their talents.” It’s about the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit working in diverse ways in their midst to fulfill God’s mission through them, the gathered body of Christ.”

Just as Paul saw unique gifts, you will have uniquely gifted persons in your congregation.

This worship series is an especially good time to pair worship with faith formation, so that people can explore their gifts of the Spirit. If you chose a key song to take you through the series, continue that today.

PREACHING NOTES

Sermon Notes and Suggestions for the Second Sunday after Epiphany

Week 2, Discovering and Activating Our Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

This is our second week of our “Greater Gifts” sermon series. Today, we will be exploring how we can discover and activate the gifts God has given us. Last week, we looked at baptism as a “first gift” from God that places us on a lifelong journey of discipleship, following Jesus. Last week, we spent time remembering our baptisms and thinking about how baptism is a gift filled with expectation and mystery, often leading us to share our experiences of God’s grace with others.

If you had people express an interest in being baptized last Sunday, you might consider placing the baptismal service here, right before the sermon, and then use the sermon to continue the conversation around “Greater Gifts.”

For this Sunday, we recommend finding a Spiritual Gifts Survey to be included in your bulletin, or consider developing your own that ties spiritual gifts to specific service opportunities in your church or ministry setting. Here are a few possibilities:

Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts booklet (free pdf or order a hard copy)

<https://www.seeallthepeople.org/resources-downloads/>

Spiritual Gifts Online Assessment from Path1:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/new-church-starts/spiritual-gifts>

Spiritual Gifts Online Assessment offered by UMCCom

<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/spiritual-gifts-online-assessment>

Children's Moment Suggestion:

Find two battery-operated toys that have an easily accessible battery compartment and whose functions are relatively clear (examples: a rescue vehicle with flashing lights, a dog that barks and walks, a bubble maker that makes bubbles). Remove one battery from each toy. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-6:

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.

- Talk about how God made each person with unique spiritual gifts. Explain that over the course of our lives, we discover what those gifts are. Give a few examples.
- Take each of the toys, and ask the children what they think the toys were created to do.
 - Bubble maker —make bubbles; rescue vehicle — light up and make noises to let people know it is coming; dog — barks and walks
- Ask the children how we could see if we are correct. (Pretend to look for the on/off switch; let the kids help you.) When the toys don't work, act confused, and ask the children why they think the toys don't work. (Children indicate broken, missing batteries, etc.) Thank them.
- Say: "Just like these toys, sometimes people are created with gifts, but they don't use them. Sometimes it is because they have not yet discovered what gifts they have, but other times people know they have certain gifts but they choose not to use them."
- Our Scripture passage says that God is the one who activates spiritual gifts in everyone. Ask, "What do you suppose these toys need to do what they were created to do?" (batteries!)
- Talk about God activating the gifts in our lives as you load the batteries. Have the children turn the toys on. They work!
- Tell the children, "So remember: as you discover your spiritual gifts, make sure you let God activate them, so you can use them for good in our church, at school, at home, and in our community."

Sermon Notes:

As we move from baptisms and remembering our baptism, we recognize that the gift of baptism is only the beginning. We should begin to discover, or if it has been a while, perhaps rediscover our God-given gifts — equipping us for a lifelong journey as disciples. We were redeemed for a reason, and we are given gifts to fulfill a greater purpose.

(v1) “Now concerning spiritual gifts . . . I do not want you to be uninformed.”

Right away in the passage we hear that Paul wants us to learn and understand where spiritual gifts come from, the types of gifts, and perhaps most important, that they must be activated by the Holy Spirit. Paul does not want followers of Jesus to be “uninformed.” The implication here is that the church in Corinth was struggling with its understanding of spiritual gifts. Apparently, the church in Corinth had some people cursing Jesus and claiming that they had spiritual gifts to do so (verse 3). Paul declares that those two things cannot coexist. Now before you discount this example from Paul as something we would not understand today, let me ask you this: “Have you ever experienced Christians saying or acting out in ways that do not seem to be in line with Jesus? Could this also be an example of individuals essentially cursing Jesus and the ways of Jesus by their speech and actions, while at the same time saying that they are followers of Jesus?”

What if we applied Paul’s warning to the ways we speak and act each day? Do we essentially “curse Jesus” when our speech and actions and the applications of our spiritual gifts do not reflect Jesus? (You may want to take a moment and encourage disciples to focus on self-reflection and steer clear of judging others.)

In this passage, Paul lists a variety of spiritual gifts for our journey:

(8) . . . utterance of wisdom

(8) . . . utterance of knowledge

(9) . . . faith . . .

(9) . . . gifts of healing . . .

(10) . . . working of miracles . . .

(10) . . . prophecy . . .

(10) . . . discernment of spirits . . .

(10) . . . various kinds of tongues . . . interpretation of tongues . . .

More spiritual gifts are listed in other passages. Romans 12:6-8: prophecy, serving, teaching, encouragement, giving, leadership, and mercy. Ephesians 4:11-13: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. Reference *Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts* booklet at

<https://www.seeallthepeople.org/resources-downloads/> or another spiritual gifts assessment of your choosing to assist parishioners in discovering their gifts. Spend a brief moment on each of the gifts that corresponds to the assessment that you are using.

(11) All these are activated by one and the same Spirit . . .

(7) To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Activation of your spiritual gift is essential. Activation is putting your gifts into practice “for the common good.” What good is a gift if it is never shared for the good of others?

I have a few credit cards in my wallet, as I am sure many of you do. When you receive a new credit card, you usually find a sticker on it that provides an 800 number to call in order to do what? To **activate** the card. Have any of you ever received the card and placed it in your wallet, never calling to activate the card? Not if you need to use the card! So why do some disciples clearly recognize a spiritual gift but leave the sticker on and never use it? Next week, we will explore this further as we think about how not activating our spiritual gifts weakens the community to which we belong.

One of my favorite quotes related to discovering and activating our spiritual gifts comes from philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader, Howard Thurman, who said:

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”¹

The same is true for our spiritual gifts. The world, our church, our community, your family, your workplace, doesn’t need you to do tasks for which you are not gifted. The world, our church, our community, our families, our workplace needs you to discern what gifts you have been given, and activate them to the fullest for the common good! The world needs more people “who have come alive,” who have been activated by the God’s Holy Spirit!

Amen.

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[Call to Worship for Human Relations Day](#)

[Litany for Human Relations Day](#)

[Resources in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Human Relations Day \(UMCgiving.org\)](#)

[Human Relations Day resources from Discipleship Ministries](#)

[Martin Luther King, Jr. Day \(January 18\)](#)

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Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads

GREATER GIFTS
EPIPHANY 3: BEING NEEDY
Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C
January 27, 2019

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

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Planning for This Series

The third week in our series is “Being Needy.” Conventionally, the idea of being needy has negative connotations. However, we’d like to look at the idea of being needy from a different perspective: we need one another. Just as God arranged the members of our bodies, so God arranged the members of our communities. So this week, we put a positive spin on being needy.

In worship, concentrate on the idea of “one-bodyness,” as Taylor Burton-Edwards described it. If you celebrate Communion each week, this is a great example of one-bodyness. Focusing on the one-bodyness of your congregation will help you as you look forward to the next series, #SeeAllThePeople, where the congregation is meant to get out of the church and into the community. But this week, continue to focus on the gathered congregation. Lift up gifts that complement one another. Make plans to use those gifts.

PREACHING NOTES

Sermon Notes and Suggestions for Third Sunday after Epiphany (MLK Jr. Day, Monday Jan 21)

Week 3: Interrelated Gifts, Being Needy

[1 Corinthians 12:12-31a](#)

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.

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.”

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.”²

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.

(1v4-17) “. . . 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.

² King, M. L., & Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. (1968). *Letter from a Birmingham jail.*. Atlanta, Ga.:Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

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. Join us next week as we seek that final and crucial piece.

Amen.

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GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[21st Century Worship Resources for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C](#)

[A Call to Worship for the Third Sunday after Epiphany, Year C](#)

[21st Century Africana Liturgy Resources for the Third Sunday After the Epiphany, Year C](#)

[Resources in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Liturgy Resources for Black History Month \(February\)](#)

[Benediction for Black History Month](#)

[United Methodist Hymnal Resources for Black History Month](#)

Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads

GREATER GIFTS
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany: LOVE
February 3, 2019

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

See full texts, artwork, and *Revised Common Lectionary Prayers* for this Sunday at [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
Para obtener más recursos leccionario, [Estudios Exegéticos: Homiléticos](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

January

- January 1 [New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)
- January 6 [Epiphany Sunday/Epiphany](#)
- January 13 [Baptism of the Lord](#)
- January 11 [Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)
- January 20 [Human Relations Day](#)
- January 20 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)
- January 21 [Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)
- January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

February

- All Month* [Black History Month](#)
- February 2 Presentation of the Lord/Candlemas
- February 10 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#)
- February 18 [Presidents Day \(USA\)](#)

March

- March 1 [World Day of Prayer](#)
- March 3 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)
- March 6 [Ash Wednesday](#), and [Lent Begins](#)
- March 31 [UMCOR Sunday](#)

April

- April 14 Palm/Passion Sunday

April 14-20	Holy Week
April 18	Maundy Thursday
April 19	Good Friday
April 20	Holy Saturday
April 21	Easter Sunday
April 24	<u>Festival of God's Creation</u>
April 25	<u>World Malaria Day (UM Communications)</u>

Planning for This Series

If you are a church that celebrates Communion on the first Sunday of the month, then you are in luck. Communion is the perfect liturgical act to wrap up this series about the oneness of your congregation. You could also consider having a love feast after the worship service. The title for this week is “Love,” and the reading will be familiar to anyone who has attended a wedding. Because the reading is so familiar, consider having an unusual voice read the Scripture today, perhaps a child or youth. Or split the reading into two or three parts. This will help your congregation hear these words with fresh ears.

In 2015, Taylor Burton-Edwards encouraged testimonies of God’s love as part of the worship service. This would be an excellent wrap-up to the series and a launch into the next series #SeeAllThePeople, which is all about putting God’s love into action out in the community and the world. Use the idea of love in your worship to bridge from this week into next week. Be sure to invite folks to join you for #SeeAllThePeople, which will take us all the way to Ash Wednesday.

PREACHING NOTES

Sermon Notes and Suggestions for Fourth Sunday after Epiphany Week 4, The Heart of Our Gifts

[1 Corinthians 13:1-13](#)

This is the last Sunday of our “Greater Gifts” sermon series. We began with baptism and remembering our baptism as a gift from God that starts our journey. We then looked at how each of us has gifts and that it is important to discover, or in some cases re-discover, what those gifts are — AND to activate them — to put them into practice for the common good of others. And last week, we explored the interconnectedness of each of us and each of the gifts that we bring to this community. We learned that we

need one another in a fundamental way. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, we are “caught in an inescapable network of mutuality . . . whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”³ So whether and how we use our God-given gifts, or fail to use our God-given gifts, actually affects more than just ourselves. Today, we are exploring a final and crucial piece to living into our “Greater Gifts.”

Children’s Moment Suggestion:

Ask: “How many of you like superheros?”

“Who are your favorite superheros?” (receive and repeat responses)

“If you could have any superhero power, what would it be?” (receive and repeat responses)

“In our text this morning from the book of Corinthians, the writer Paul, lists a bunch of amazing powers, or gifts, not unlike superhero powers. Listen to these:

“He says,

If I can speak all the languages of the world and of heaven.

If I can see the future.

If I could tell a mountain move and it would move.”

“Do those sound like super powers to you?”

“Those would be some pretty amazing gifts, wouldn’t they?”

‘You could understand and speak all the languages of the world — Spanish, Chinese, Russian, French, German, Greek. That would be amazing.”

“You could look into the future and know exactly what would happen.”

“You could move things just by saying, ‘MOVE!’ – an entire mountain!”

“Now listen to what Paul wants us to understand:

- Even if we had any of these superpowers, it would not matter, if we did not have LOVE; that is, if we were not loving disciples.
- All the gifts or talents in the world, are not as important as the love within us.
- That’s how important love is to Paul.

There are a lot of things that seem important sometimes, but what is most important is our love for one another. Amen? Amen.”

Sermon Notes:

Today we are looking at 1 Corinthians 13, the famous LOVE passage many of us know by heart, especially if you have been to a wedding recently. Hopefully, since week 2 of our “Greater Gifts” sermon series, you have had time to study and prayerfully reflect on

³ King, M. L., & Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. (1968). “Letter from a Birmingham jail.” Atlanta, Ga.: Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

the passages that list the various spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:12-31a, Romans 12:6-8, and Ephesians 4:11-13). Our prayer is that this is an ongoing, perhaps yearly practice that you take up to discover what gifts God has given you and the best ways to activate them to serve others. And now that your gifts are becoming more clear to you, I want you to hold those and reflect on this morning's passage, which tells us that none of those gifts matter if we don't have love and if are gifts are not guided by love.

Paul says,

13:1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

13:2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

13:3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

All that we do in life, or are able to do, is meaningless, if we do not have love.

I recently saw the movie *Christopher Robin*. This i movie looks at what happened to Christopher Robin, Winnie-the-Pooh, and friends from the 100 Acre Wood after Christopher Robin grew up. As adults, we are introduced to a hard-working Christopher Robin, who works for a luggage company. It becomes clear that Christopher Robin works long hours and seems to be having less and less time for his family. When weekend plans to go to the country with his family change due to work, his wife and daughter become very disappointed. His wife chides him for choosing work over his family and for missing out on the life that is right in front of him. Later, Winnie-the-Pooh asks Christopher if his "case of important papers" is more important than a red balloon, to which Christopher replies, "they are." (Christopher Robin at this point in his life has given up all forms of play and replaced them with work.) Later in the film, Pooh asks Christopher Robin if his case of important papers is more important than his daughter. Christopher Robin pauses and then says, "of course not." Christopher Robin is reminded of what is really important in life — his family and the quality of time spent with them.

So often, even in the church, it is easy for us to begin to value the wrong things: productivity over spirituality; effectiveness over a caring heart; people in the pews over lives transformed; being members over being disciples; power and position over service and servant-leadership. We can even begin to think so highly of our gifts that we forget to love. Paul reminds us that it does not matter how "successful" we are as a church if love does not flow through everything that we do.

Now that we are discovering and activating our gifts, understanding how we are dependent on one another, will we let love – love of God and love of neighbor guide us?

Amen.

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Articles and Resources

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