

Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC

January 16th, 2022

*The Common Good*

Rev. Susie Maxwell

*Let us pray . . .*

The Sunday before Dr. Martin Luther King Day is a time churches lift up the achievements of this great civil rights leader through liturgy and music, prayer and message. Dr. King had some intense spiritual gifts, like:

Evangelism: The gift of evangelism is the gift of faith-sharing and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to those we meet.

Leadership: The gift of leadership is a visionary, and forward looking gift that enables people to stay focused on where God might be leading us as individuals, congregations, and communities at any given time.

And of course,

Prophecy: The gift of prophecy is the ability to speak God's word to others, or more appropriately to be open for God to speak God's word through us.

Furthermore, as the Apostle Paul taught, spiritual gifts are for *sharing* for the common good. And Dr. King shone brilliantly when it came to sharing for the common good — but it came at a price. And we all know how it ended.

Our lesson for today — which was finely acted out by Doug and Chris — is a letter from the Apostle Paul addressing the Christians in Corinth because they are creating divisions through arguing over who has the

best Spiritual things — seeing these things as evidence of spiritual sophistication and superiority.

So Paul attempts to sort them out by saying, “Look, they’re not Spiritual things, they are Spiritual gifts. The shift from “things” to “gifts” moves them from being personal possessions or achievements for bragging to manifestations of gifts coming from God’s grace. Paul’s point is that you cannot boast about things that come from God. So the glory is to God, not yourselves. Furthermore, these things are to be shared for the common good.

The common good.

What would you say is our church’s common good?

Now, shifting to the Spiritual Gifts Inventory. If you did the inventory, what were some of your gifts, and were there any surprises?

For example, my top 3 gifts were:

1. Faith — meaning that my bottom line belief is that God will prevail and this gift of faith inspires others to hang in there when they're tempted to give up.

2. Exhortation — This gift offers encouragement, wise counsel, unflagging support, and empowerment.

And finally, 3. Compassion — The gift of compassion moves people to action on behalf of those in need.

What about you, any surprises or confirmations?

The important thing about Spiritual gifts is that they are to be shared for the common good — not exploited but shared.

Ruth, I hope you don't mind, but I'm needing to have you shine in the spotlight for a moment here. You see, Ruth and my own exhaustion are

the reasons I am moved to help us identify and contribute to our common good. Ruth and I were sharing a visit recently and in response to my asking her if there was anything she needed, she turned everything upside down by saying, “What can I do for others?”

I was — surely no surprise — moved to tears. We talked about what she liked to do and could do and Ruth found that writing notes would bring her meaning while lifting up others.

Ruth’s surprising response and my own exhaustion with trying to manage the bulk of the needs on my own are what moved me to address spiritual gifts this morning.

What I’ll be doing across this winter is helping us organize our gifts to share for our common good. I say this because I am routinely bombarded with requests for a wide range of help both within and without our faith community and it’s coming at a big price and I am beginning to get compassion fatigue — makes sense since compassion

is one of the gifts God trusts me with. But the other side of that fatigue is resentment, which can be incredibly destructive. Identifying and naming the dark side of anything we do is critical to keeping it from overpowering us — that's why we named resistances earlier.

So I'll be working to engage you to help me define the needs connected to our common good with a particular emphasis on what's happening locally because that is where 99% of all the asks come from and they're increasing and locally is where we can make the greatest impact and hopefully create the most engagement and movement for change.

I know some of you work quietly and without any recognition behind the scenes, helping others within our church or assisting those outside of our church and I thank you deeply.

If you haven't taken the Spiritual Gifts Inventory, I encourage you to do so and I invite you to join me in organizing our gifts to share for the common good — in life-giving and life-changing ways. For sure there

will be a price to pay at times: Sometimes that price is fatigue or discouragement. Sometimes the price is despair or inconvenience.

We don't do the work to feel good — trust me, lately I'm left feeling desperately unhappy — which is why I need help — but we do this work because Jesus told us to love one another and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

And while we won't be able to meet all needs, we have to do what we can, remembering that all burdens are made lighter when shared. So in closing, be reflecting on your gifts — God doesn't give you gifts that make you unhappy. You will be working from a source of internal joy made sustainable if we all pitch in and we shall overcome.