

On December 12, 1980, a small startup company that no one had ever heard of called “Apple Computer” first became a public corporation and began offering its very first shares of stock. In the business world, this is referred to as an “initial public offering” and it requires a lot of documentation to be filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission to protect those investing in the new company.

One such document required is a full disclosure of any foreseeable weaknesses or problems as the new corporation’s goods or services go to market. Here is what Steve Jobs, one of the founders of Apple, disclosed as a “foreseeable weakness” for the company, 44 years ago:

“The expansion of the personal computer market will require a continued orientation effort directed at informing individuals of the means by which the computer may be utilized to enhance personal efficiency and productivity. Towards this end, the Company is committed to an extensive advertising and promotional effort.”

Now, in case the legalese and jargon overwhelmed you, let me cut to the chase: Apple was afraid that people wouldn’t buy their computer because they wouldn’t know what to do with it. In 1980, a PC was a complete novelty. It would be years before people would figure out all the useful things you could do with a computer. And that happened in large part because tech companies like Apple and Microsoft and the rest spent millions – billions – of dollars advertising just how useful a computer could be.

Sometimes I feel like I, as a pastor, have to do the same thing. God has given to his church some amazing tools. Blessings that will transform your life, more than the invention of the personal computer. But nobody knows about them. They are, as St Paul once put it, treasures hidden in jars of clay. And my job as a pastor is to advertise. To hold them up and say, “Look at this incredible gift of the Holy Spirit. Don’t you see what this can do for you?”

That’s exactly what St Paul is doing in our Epistle this morning. He is advertising the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church in Corinth. And he is enabling me to advertise those same gifts to our congregation. Because the gifts of God are useful in every time and place. And, as he says in the very first verse, Paul does not want anyone uninformed about them.

And yet, when we think about spiritual gifts, laymen and laywomen often dismiss the possibility that they have any. They think of spiritual gifts as something that pastors have or that missionaries have or that church workers like teachers and DCE’s and deaconesses have. Ordinary Christians sitting in the pews tend to assume that these are not for them.

And yet, that very term – ordinary Christians – is misleading. There is no such thing as an ordinary Christian because there’s also no such thing as an extraordinary Christian. We are all just Christians. Followers and disciples of Jesus Christ. Children of God baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Doing the work that he has given us to do.

Which is Paul’s first point. We do not do the work of God because we are extraordinary, but because we have an extraordinary God working through us. We are sinful and frail and human, but that doesn’t prevent God from doing a work through every one of us that is perfect and powerful and divine. The whole Bible is a testimony of all the perfect, powerful, divine things that God did through sinful, frail human beings.

So there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. There are varieties of activities, but the same God. Spirit, Lord, and God. Spirit, referring to the Holy Spirit. Lord, referring to Jesus as Lord, as he just did in verse 3. And God, referring as Paul usually does, to God the Father. This is a Trinitarian statement that Paul is making. Many gifts, many acts of service, many kinds of activities. But one God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – empowering them all in everyone.

So what are these gifts and acts of service and kinds of activities? Well, Paul will go into some specific examples in a moment, but he begins by describing them as pretty much everything we do for the common good.

In other words, Paul is talking about our vocations. The ways that we love our neighbors in our daily lives. Through our jobs. Through our marriages. Through our families. Through our lives as members of a community and citizens of a nation. These are your vocations and these are where you use your spiritual gifts for the common good.

St Peter delves into this same topic in his first letter. He writes, *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”*

Our vocations may not seem very “spiritual” in nature from a human standpoint. You may not feel like you're using a spiritual gift in the same way as someone who does as evangelism or church work or caring for the poor. You may not feel like your vocation has any spiritual connection whatsoever.

But the truth is that the Holy Spirit is at work through all human actions and words, however mundane or majestic they appear to our finite eyes. All of these services, words, and activities, assuming they do not violate the Word of God, are part of the Holy Spirit’s work toward our neighbor. They are all ways that we proclaim that Jesus is Lord.

Satan tries to lie to us about this fact. He takes advantage of every opportunity to focus our hearts and minds on the spirit of “me” rather than the Spirit of God. He tries to turn us in on ourselves, spurring on that selfish Old Adam. And so, when we look at the examples of the spiritual gifts that Paul describes for us in our text, he is particularly adamant about reminding us about how selfless and how cooperative the Holy Spirit always is.

Simply put, the church is not a whole bunch of individuals working individually for individual goals. The church is a body working together for a common goal by a single Spirit of God. The day-to-day work of the Holy Spirit through our human hands is not an individual effort. It is each of us playing one part of a much greater whole.

And so, Paul says, there are those who are given wisdom by the Holy Spirit and there are those who are given knowledge by the Holy Spirit. Now, those two things sound very similar, and they are. But there is a difference between them, especially when you look at them in Greek.

Wisdom, in this case, is referring to philosophical wisdom, moral wisdom, or divine wisdom. It's the wisdom of theologians and ethicists. People who you can go to when you need advice and they'll give you good, sound, godly wisdom. Whereas, knowledge is referring to experience and practical expertise. People who know about a particular subject or know how to fix a problem. And the church needs both. They are both useful to the kingdom of God. They are both useful to our neighbors and community.

Paul says there are those with the gift of faith, those with a gift of healing, and those with a gift of miracles. Now, we would probably look at those three and think, “Aren't those all going to be the same person? Isn't a person who can miraculously heal people going to be someone of great faith?” But Paul doesn't indicate that.

Having a gift of healing is not the same thing as having a gift of miracles, because there plenty of people who can heal without utilizing any miraculous means. They're called doctors and nurses and paramedics. Likewise, having a gift of faith is different than having a gift of healing, because there are plenty of doctors who struggle to have faith after what they see working to heal people. And they need people with strong faith to encourage them and pray for them.

Paul says that there are those with the ability to distinguish between different kinds of spirits. Because there are two very different kinds of spirits in this work. There is the Spirit of God and there is the Spirit of the devil. A spirit of truth and a spirit of deception. A spirit of death and a spirit of life.

And maybe more than ever, we need people who can read the news and go to the movies and watch TV and warn others, “What I just saw is of a different spirit than what Christians should be watching. It is of a different spirit than what Christians should be thinking.” We need that kind of discernment in our churches and in our relationships.

And finally, Paul says, there are those who are given different tongues and those who can interpret different tongues. And this is also an important facet of God's kingdom. Because, as we saw on Pentecost morning, God's Word needs to be translated. It need to go out into all the world in the language that those people speak.

And so we have the work of Lutheran Bible Translators. And we have the work of Faith Comes by Hearing. And we have the work of ordinary Americans who brings God's Word to the specific dialects and languages of their communities. So that they can hear the amazing work of God for them.

All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit. Apportioned to each of us as he wills. Not because we're so extraordinary, but because the Spirit who has enabled us to say “Jesus is Lord” is continuing to help us say “Jesus is Lord” throughout our daily lives. He has redeemed you, a lost and condemned creature. Purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. Not with gold or silver, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. That you may be his own.

No matter your vocation. No matter how spiritual you think of yourself. You have the Spirit of God within you. And he is working through you. Amen.