

Bible study lesson related to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW)

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Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-26: ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ 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." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ 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; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (NRSV)

Passage Observations

In 1 Cor 12, Apostle Paul is addressing the Corinthian church on the issue of spiritual gifts. He speaks of their origin, purpose and use in order to eliminate any confusion or doubt the body of Christ may have about them. Paul emphasizes that there is unity even in the midst of difference through the power of the Spirit. Let us consider the following questions as we reflect on the passage:

- What is the significance of Paul saying that it is the same God who activates all the varieties of gifts, services and activities? (12:4-6)
- What examples do we see around us (locally, nationally and internationally) of spiritual gifts being used for "the common good"? (12:7)
- Why did Paul identify these specific gifts? What do you believe is their significance to the work of the church? (12:8-10)
- What connections can be made between Paul's explanation of spiritual gifts and the way the human body operates? (12:12-17)

- Why does Paul choose to use the human body as an analogy for the Corinthian church? (12:12-26)
- How does this passage relate to our understandings of leadership and organizing?

Points of Interpretation and Application

#1 Spiritual gifts are for the common good

Keeping that last question in mind, let us now consider how this passage relates to the work of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). While Paul places emphasis on spiritual gifts, the most important point to keep in mind is Paul's assertion in verse 7 that "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." From the onset of this chapter, Paul challenges us to think about what we do with what God has entrusted us with and to always consider how our sense of individualism remains tied to the well-being of the whole. Thus, what we buy in supermarkets, where we choose to eat out and the companies we invest in make a difference in the lives of those around us and particularly in the lives of those we do not know.

We know that the Corinthian church that Paul was addressing was not driven by the same capitalistic economic structure that often promotes individualism in our day but Paul's letters suggest that the church was often troubled by members who wanted to promote their self interests at the cost of the community. The twofold danger of this was that there were members whose gifts were being used in selfish ways and those self-serving ways may have been having a negative impact on the body as a whole. Many biblical scholars have said that Paul's emphasis on the "common good" shows that spiritual gifts are for the sake of edification, the building up of the whole.

Questions for Reflection:

- How does this principle of "the common good" relate to the mission and work of the CIW?
- What difference might it make if all our gifts and actions, particularly acts of consumption, kept the common good in mind and did not focus primarily on self-interest?
- How can we better use what we possess (internally and externally) for the good of the whole?

#2 Spiritual gifts reflect the many parts of the one body

Paul identifies several spiritual gifts that serve a variety of purposes. The gifts he names in verses 8-10 speak to God's desire to communicate God's divine will to God's people and to use believers as instruments of healing and restoration. In verse 11, Paul states that all the gifts "are the work of one and the same Spirit" who allots them as it chooses. Paul goes on to say that "the body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body" (v.12). These teachings make it clear that there are no insignificant members in the body of Christ because each member of the whole brings with him or her valuable gifts, skills, and/or resources.

Similarly, the CIW emphasizes that all members of their movement are leaders and none is greater than the other. As the church is one united body, they are one though they are many and they are made stronger because of their differences and not in spite of them. The remainder of

the verses in the passage compares the church to the human body. Paul speaks of dependency, diversity and strength in unity. This relates to the work of the CIW because their success would not have been possible if it were not for alliances. It has required everyone doing their part and contributing in all the ways that they are empowered to- everyone from the farmworkers themselves to the corporations to the stockholders to the consumers. It is the unity of human rights and grassroots organizations, labor groups, students and particularly the religious community that has supported the CIW in its missions of being a strong, unified whole. As Paul understood, we must remember that “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

Questions for Reflection:

- How might the work of ministry and organizing be different if we considered everyone at the table a leader?
- Why are alliances so important to the work of the CIW?
- Why does oneness through diversity matter so much to the CIW and why should it matter to us?
- Why would it matter if the church was not a part of the unified whole that supported the CIW and organizations like it?

Prayer

Voice: God, we give thanks for the sharing of ideas and inspiration.

All: We pray that these ideas inspire us to think more critically and act more boldly.

Voice: God, we give thanks for the gifts that you have bestowed upon us.

All: We pray that those gifts always be used for and with the common good in mind.

Voice: God, we give thanks for the hope that you have given us today.

All: We pray that hope remains on the course with us as we seek to go forth and do your will in the world. Amen