

1 Corinthians 14:12-13, 23-25

“Expect Discovery”

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Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
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Introduction:

The Apostle Paul is writing to the Corinthians about spiritual gifts. The people in the church are interested in gifts that are flashy and unusual, such as speaking in tongues, but he reminds them that the Spirit gives these gifts to the church in order to build it up and to help newcomers experience the good news.

The Reading:

*Since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church.
¹³ Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret.*

²³ If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. ²⁵ After the secrets of the unbeliever’s heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, “God is really among you!”

It is a real joy to take care of our granddaughter, Emma. To watch her is better than TV, because at fifteen and a half months, she is discovering *so* many things! Just yesterday, as she walked into the front entryway, she saw patches of light from the sun shining in on the floor, and like a prism, they were in rainbow colors. Naturally, she bent down to touch them, thinking that she could pick up the light. When that didn’t work, she said, “Ohhh!”

Discovery doesn’t have to go away as we grow up! Indeed, curiosity and wonder ought to be an integral part of the Christian life. Following Jesus Christ is an exciting adventure, and we should expect discoveries as we are being Church together.

The Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Directional Statement that you came up with at the beginning of this year is a case in point. Together, through a *process* of discovery, you discerned God’s call for the near future. (Screen share the document.)

One of the first steps you took was to name and claim your collective God-given spiritual gifts. You said that one of your strengths is hospitality... Another, music... Then the gift of service... Plus the gift of diversity – not only of age and religious backgrounds, but as a community of various economic and social locations, ethnicities, cultures, and colors.

Like the cosmopolitan Corinthian congregation to which Paul wrote this morning’s letter, *you* also have multiple spiritual gifts. And there are *still more discoveries* to make!

As you go forward in this direction - God's call for your future - you will discover *more* about your four spiritual gifts, as well as additional ones.

For instance, it is my impression that your gift of *music* is currently mostly about how much you enjoy and appreciate music. You love Juan's contributions to the worship service, as well as the choir's. Hosting more musical events for Roslindale is also appealing to you. But I think that there is more for you to discover about how to make music together. From *congregational* singing, to percussion and playing instruments, the Holy Spirit can lead you out of some of your present shyness into showcasing this gift!

I'm not sure what *new* spiritual gifts you will discover in the next two or more years, but these four also aren't the limit of the Spirit's gifts to RCC! Going through COVID at the same time as awakenings to racial inequity and a pastoral transition, you may come to realize just how brave, flexible, and strong you are as God's people!

The Corinthians only seemed to notice one gift: the people among them who had the strange and wonderful gift of tongues. These members stood out because as they worshipped, they prayed in unintelligible sounds. Not everyone did this, and the members who did sometimes bragged about feeling so close to God that the others felt left out and inferior. Paul reminded them that this is *the last thing* that should happen in a faith community! Spiritual gifts are given in order to *build up* the Body of Christ, *not* to divide it.

Paul instructs them, instead, to ask for an *additional* gift: prophecy. Prophecy is not foretelling the future. Prophecy is the gift of interpreting tongues so that *all* of Christ's people can hear what God is saying and be edified by it.

So to repeat, as you follow this Directional Statement, you will discover deeper dimensions to your four identified gifts *and* additional ones.

But, RCC, there are *still more* discoveries to make. **As you continue in the direction of God's call for the future, your gifts will lead *others* to discover *God* among you.**

You see, the Corinthians' gifts were not just for *them*! They had to change their mindset about worship so that they were at least as interested in the *newcomers* as in their own well-being. Visitors are likely to think the church is daft and irrelevant if no one is speaking for God in clear and compelling ways!

So RCC, your Directional Statement is challenging you (and me) to test your gift of hospitality. Every congregation that I have ever served has thought of itself as being really friendly, open, and welcoming, but not everything that we are used to is inclusive to others. To be authentically hospitable, we have to put ourselves in the shoes of those who are new and unused to church. We are not the kind of congregation that speaks in tongues, but the 'language' that we speak in our worship service has a lot of code words, unknown to secular folks. So we, too, need to ask God for the gift of interpretation!

If and when we do ask, those who try church for the first time will hear sense from our worship service. Those who are lonely and tired of our fragmented and hopeless society will experience a true, caring community. Families who want their kids to believe in something bigger will be blessed. Those who are beaten down by injustice will be built up by our solidarity and action for social justice. Then, all who attend will *discover* to their great joy that God is really among you!