

"Divine Footprints"

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Fellow Recipients of the Lord's goodness:

As human beings become more and more urbanized, we grow more and more disconnected from the land, and in the process we lose many valuable things. So much of the practical knowledge of our forefathers has been lost to us. We could argue just how important or practical much of that knowledge is or could be today, but there seems to be a sort of cumulative effect that tends to separate us from the connection to, and appreciation of, our God. Farming and ranching, for example, require a simple kind of trust that doesn't seem to exist as strongly in many other occupations. Farmers bury their livelihood each spring – trusting their God for that which lies outside of their control. It can be difficult to maintain that same sort of simple trust in other occupations.

One of the old skills that has been lost to us is the art of tracking. Many of our forefathers could look at a horse track, for example, and tell you which horse made the track, when it was made, and even the approximate weight of the rider. Some of their gifts in that area were truly remarkable. The point today is that we seem to be losing sight of a different kind of track – God's footprints in our hearts and lives.

In a way our text for today speaks to this. That text is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the 12th Chapter:

^{NKJ} **1 Corinthians 12:1-11** *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: ² You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. ³ Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: ⁸ for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹*

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

So far the very Words of God. Heavenly Father, grant that we might rightly see and accept that these are your words, given to us from heaven for our instruction and growth. So also we pray, ***"Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"*** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, some of the most helpful insights into the human condition are revealed to us only piecemeal. That means that we first have to carefully observe both ourselves and others, then to gather and organize what we see over time, and finally to thereby develop an understanding of the patterns that emerge. A fisherman, for example, finds a likely fishing hole and decides not just to fish there, but to learn something. On the first day, he catches fish at sunrise, but none the rest of the day. The next day he catches no fish at all, and the next he catches fish all throughout the day. This doesn't help him develop any sort of a pattern, so next he charts weather conditions, phases of the moon, barometric pressures, and different depths (along with times) and he finally, over the course of many years, begins to develop some reliable patterns.

The point is that if such a thing would be helpful in something as relatively trivial as fishing, imagine how helpful it would be to identify patterns in our own behavior. Think about how much better off we would be if we could identify our natural inclinations and weaknesses before those tendencies caused harm – to ourselves or to others.

Consider the following "pattern": A little child suddenly makes the decision that no one will be allowed to help her get dressed. From now on she will do her own dressing, thank you very much. Obviously this is just one "dot," and therefore no patterns can be observed. Next, however, you note that your children all reach over and try to steer the car when dad or mom is driving. Years later, those same children want to decorate and arrange their own rooms, want to decide when to come in at night and when to go to bed, they want to pick out their own clothes, and to decide how to spend their money. Later, you might notice that each child wants to make decisions that will affect the entire family. Still later in life we might become absorbed by financial planning and place great emphasis on insurance of every kind. Finally, in old age, individuals often insist on making the decision as to when their pain, and their time of grace on earth, will come to an end.

These are the dots, the individual observances that we can all make every day of our lives. What do they all connect to teach us? What general truth do they reveal about mankind? *Human beings want control.*

We *crave* control. We want to believe that we are in charge and that we are thereby protected, at least in part, against the great unknown calamities that lurk around every corner of this grand adventure called life.

So much for the pattern, now what do we do with it? What do we learn from it? The fact that we all seem to have this desire for control is not always bad. It is good when we are moved to take responsibility and exercise control over those things God has commanded of us. It is bad when we struggle to take control of that which lies beyond our power to control. But here's the really strange part: that which lies within our power to control we generally ignore, while that which is beyond of our control consumes our thoughts and efforts. The best that such fruitless struggle for control can bring is frustration. The worst is a loss of faith, as we shall see. God has given us trust for those times when we are not in control, and he has given us gifts and abilities to deal with those things that lie within our control.

Interestingly enough, amusement park rides give the thrilling illusion of being wildly out of control. The fact remains that you are *not* out of control. It's the illusion that people want. No one in his or her right mind would pay money to be dangerously out of control when we can get that for free on most freeways. We want to be safe and in control, but we sometimes thrill to the *illusion* of being out of control.

No big revelation there, but what *is* rather surprising is that mankind also craves the exact opposite illusion - the illusion of being *in* control when in fact we are not. The world is terrified by everything they perceive to be uncontrollable - cancer, crime, drunk drivers, drug addicts, plane crashes, terrorists – the list goes on and on. Americans spend billions of dollars every year to create the illusion that they (we) are exercising some sort of control over the things that really cannot be controlled. So it is, for example, that we install burglar alarms and smoke detectors to create the illusion of safety; we take vitamins and exercise to create the illusion that we will avoid cancer or other serious diseases; we spend billions on insurance to create the illusion that our financial futures and general health are secure.

The Christian has a tremendous advantage here. We take prudent precautions by eating well, exercising, by fastening our seat belts and by locking our doors, but those sorts of things do not form the basis of our hope and confidence. We have God's promise that our lives are in *his* hands; that *he* is in control. The very hairs of our heads are numbered and not one of them falls without the permission of our Heavenly Father. You and I are not in control, but we sleep soundly at night because we know that our Good Shepherd is. He is watching over and protecting us. Worry, therefore, need never be a factor in our lives.

Sound like anyone you know? The above is a picture of the *ideal* Christian, but who among us is ideal? Which of us doesn't forget (perhaps more often than not) that God is in control? Satan observes this tendency in Christians, even if we do not. He knows how to play on our desire to control our surroundings and gleefully sustains the illusion that we are doing so. Satan is thrilled whenever we fail to distinguish between what we can and cannot control. This is nowhere more true than in the area of spiritual control. In fact the devil is particularly ecstatic when he can persuade us to take credit for what God alone has done for us in connection with our salvation.

Don't underestimate the devil; he's no one's fool. He knows that he probably cannot persuade a true Christian that Jesus did not die on the cross. (I cannot, in fact, remember the last time anyone tried to deny this historic fact.) Yet the devil knows that mankind craves control, and he uses our own weakness against us. If he cannot convince us that Jesus did not die on the cross, then he will try to confuse our understanding of just what Jesus accomplished by such a death, and what that death actually means to us.

How pointless (and yet how typical) for mankind to try to gain control of the uncontrollable, and to take credit for what *was* and *is*, from first to last, an undeserved gift of God. ("***It is by Grace you have been saved...***") Here is where *trust* comes into play, and where (as the sermon title indicates) we need to learn to identify the divine footprints in our own hearts. We have been given *trust* exactly for this reason. There are certain things that cannot be controlled by man. God has worked the miracle of conversion in us. God has declared us not guilty, not because of anything we have done, but because of what Jesus has done. We were powerless against any and every spiritual enemy, but Jesus conquered them all as our Champion. Thanks and praise be to our God for his control in our lives, and for the gift of trust that leads us to believe that God is in control. Salvation has been won for us. We are forgiven. Faith itself is therefore a divine footprint – evidence that God has visited our hearts.

Unfortunately, Satan is not easily discouraged or dissuaded. Wherever mankind acknowledges that certain things lie beyond his control, the devil tries to convince us that *all things* lie beyond our control. You would think, given our natural inclinations in this area, that we would naturally assume control of all that lies within our power. Not so. It's the "grass is greener" scenario. We want most what we cannot have.

The fact is we cannot control coming to faith, but we can expose ourselves regularly to the one power that both brought us to faith and keeps us in that faith. We can, through the all-important working of God

the Holy Spirit within us, make choices that promote our spiritual welfare. We can also make spiritually destructive choices. We did not have the power or ability to choose spiritual life, but we do have the power to torture our spirits, even to the point of destruction. We can choose spiritual death.

What we find then is truly perplexing. When we have a measure of control given or assigned to us by God, then we don't seem to want to exercise that power. It's the roller coaster mentality. When we have a measure of control, we like to act as if we do not.

How do we do this? Not only by starving our spirits from the daily Word, by poisoning our bodies with sin and evil thoughts, and by neglecting prayer, our text reminds us how often we fail to use our God-given gifts in the service of our God and his gospel. Each one of us has been created by God with gifts that are to be used in the service of God and man. These too are God's footprints. God fully expects us to take control of these gifts, to harness them and use them according to his good purpose or plan. These gifts, according to our text, are **"the manifestations of the Spirit,"** (divine footprints) and **"they are given for the common good."** Not only then are we wasting God's blessings whenever we fail to use what he has given us to be used **"for the common good,"** we are cheating the rest of Christ's body.

Did you notice the list in our text? **"Wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, distinguishing between spirits, speaking and interpreting tongues."** All of these were necessary for the infant Christian Church. Many of these are still necessary today - especially wisdom, faith, knowledge, and the distinguishing between spirits. Some of these might be less vital needs today, and yet today we have needs that the early Church couldn't even imagine. Today the church needs legal experts, businessmen, men and women skilled in finances and bookkeeping. We need Sunday School teachers, organists, ushers and officers, cleaners, servers, greeters. Perhaps your gift is an uplifting spirit, a compassionate ear, or a love of godly discipline. Perhaps your gift is simple humility or unending patience and you teach it to others by example. Maybe you know how to invest or manage money, or you know how to **"bring up children in the way they should go"** and can help younger parents to do the same. The list is as endless as Christians are different. Our text encourages each one of us, first of all, to identify the gifts and abilities that he himself has given us – to recognize the divine footprints of our God – and then to exercise control over such gifts and to use them as a manifestation of our love for our Savior.

Jesus Christ exercised control over death and the devil. We had no such *control*, therefore in Jesus alone we *trust* for our soul's salvation. The very fact that we have such trust is evidence that our God has both visited and taken up residence in our hearts. God grant to each of us, in addition to such trust, the love and the strength to serve our Lord with the gifts he has placed

at our control – all so that the gospel might flourish, and that the schemes of Satan might come to utter and complete ruin. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 62:1-5** For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. ² The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will name. ³ You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴ You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. ⁵ For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

^{NKJ} **John 2:1-11** On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. ³ And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." ⁴ Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." ⁶ Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. ¹⁰ And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!" ¹¹ This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Second Sunday in Epiphany – January 17, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#2- (Red Hymnal)

"To Thy Temple I Repair"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 62:1-5) With what beautiful words the Holy Spirit, through the Prophet Isaiah, foretold the events we now celebrate and enjoy as members of God's Church. Though the Christian suffers on this earth, the New Jerusalem (heaven) will be unimaginably magnificent. Rejoice Christians in your promised inheritance.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 96 (Page 26)

The New Testament Lesson: (John 2:1-11) Our gracious God demonstrates in this first recorded miracle by Jesus that He provides not only our necessities but also our luxuries. For all that the Lord has given us we are thankful, yet we remain willing to sacrifice all for that "one thing needful" – the Word and Will of our Lord Jesus Christ. God grant to each of us thankful hearts that are dedicated to his service.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#718- (Verses 1-3) (Brown Hymnal)

"O Jesus, King of Glory"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Divine Footprints"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -#718- (Verses 4-5) (Brown Hymnal)

"O Jesus, King of Glory"

The Offering

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#784- (Brown Hymnal)

"Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Last Sunday (52) 2010 Average (51)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Adult Bible Study
Next Sunday	-8:45 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Fairchild, WI has called Pastor David Fuerstenau; Resurrection of Corpus Christi has called Pastor Jay Hartmann, who has accepted that call. The CLC Board of Missions reports that over \$40,000 has been offered and sent to our brothers in India for flood relief. No further offerings are needed for India flood relief.

Copy Machine – \$575 of the needed \$1900 was raised last week..

Sunday School Teachers – Please meet briefly with the Pastor during the fellowship hour this morning (5-10 minute meeting).

Elderly/Handicapped Parking – The Church Council asks that the parking stalls nearest the church doors be reserved for the elderly and handicapped.

Christmas Tree – There is a nice artificial Christmas tree in a box under the north coat rack that is free to anyone who would like it. Help yourself.

ILC Building Fund – The new Academic Center on the campus of our Immanuel High School, College, and Seminary has been completed and is proving to be a tremendous asset in the instruction of our students there. That does not mean that the building is paid for. The CLC Church Extension Fund has sufficient funds to write the \$1.74 million mortgage, but that debt will need to be repaid. Please consider regular, systematic giving to the ILC Building Fund.