

"Neither Miss, Nor Misunderstand, the Signs"

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:

Like most adults with real-life experience, you probably shake your head whenever you hear someone (often a frail, naïve young person) boldly proclaim, *"I don't need your help. I can take care of myself!"* The obvious response is, *"No. No you can't. But God can."* There are lots of nonsensical expressions out there. Another curiosity is *"I've forgotten more about (whatever) than you'll ever know."* I'm not sure how comforting or reassuring it is to hear someone brag about how much they *don't know* because they've forgotten. I always want to respond, *"So, are you saying we're equal because we both remember the same now?"* You've probably also heard someone declare that they *"could care less"* about something or other – which of course means that they care, at least a little. I'm sure my family probably got sick of hearing me say, *"You don't know what you don't know"* – which is obviously true, but I probably wore it out. It's a fitting response when someone says something like *"I know what I'm doing."* It also occurred to me if we don't know what we don't know, then we also don't know what we've forgotten. The point here is that sinful human beings are very good at absorbing the credit and glory that should always be reflected back to that One who provides every good thing. We survive danger and hardship not because we are strong and capable, but because we are in all ways provided for, and protected by, our God. Every talent and ability that we possess we have only because God first gave it to us.

All of which ought to warn us that Christians too can often misread the signs and circumstances of our lives. We too can dramatically overestimate our own strengths and abilities, or take personal pride in what God alone has given to, or accomplished through, each of us. We are obviously supposed to use all of the gifts and abilities God has given to us, but we are just as obviously never to take personal credit for them.

Our text for today speaks to this very thing. God help us to look and listen with the eyes of faith and understanding. Our text is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the 12th Chapter:

ESV 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. ⁴ ¶ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For 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 ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

This is God's Word. Heavenly Father, grant that we might rightly recognize and accept that these are *your* words, given to us by divine inspiration for our instruction and growth. So also we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

The lost art of tracking has always fascinated me. If what we read is accurate, the ability to "read sign" in the old days was truly remarkable – notwithstanding the old hunter that is said to have followed a set of tracks for days, until he was finally hit by the train. Tracking was much more than just finding a print and announcing *"Yep. He went that-a-way."* Good trackers formed an intricate mental picture of exactly what had happened – based only on a few marks in the ground. Although I find this lost art fascinating, the key point for our purposes this morning is, first of all, that the tracks themselves had no real value – other than the information that they passed along to those who could read them. It's sort of like reading the biography of a famous person. No matter how good or clever the writing, the focus isn't ink and paper or even the words themselves. It is the picture they draw of a human being that had once passed that way.

What we want to do this morning is to look carefully into our hearts and lives and to ask ourselves what we see there. The answer is often, *"Not a whole lot."* But the problem isn't that there is little or nothing there, it is that we really don't always know A) what to look for, and, B)

what it is that we are looking at when we do see what's there. Our text for this morning is going to help us with both. We'll use God's Word to tell us exactly what we are looking *for*, and then to explain exactly what it is we are looking *at* when we do find such evidence. What we'll find are signs that God himself has been present in our hearts and lives, in most cases for a very long time. It shouldn't surprise us therefore that some of what we will find is old. Some is new.

Remember, it's not about the signs themselves; it's about what the signs tell us. So first the old sign – what is it and what exactly does it tell us?

The “old sign” that Christians can identify in our hearts is the fact that we believe not only in the existence of God, but that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to sacrifice himself for our sins on the cross of Calvary. Look carefully into your heart and you'll see that that is the case. Yet for now, don't look too closely. Just get an overview. When we stare too closely (when we study ourselves too minutely in an effort to determine if we really do believe) we can actually tend to doubt what we are really seeing. So take a quick look inside and ask, *“Do I believe that Jesus died to pay for my sins?”* Yes? Then know that you've just come face to face with irrefutable evidence that God himself has visited you; that God himself has been present in your heart.

God's Word is our instructor here. In our text we find these key words: ***“Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.”***

These words teach us what we are looking at when we look inside and find faith in our hearts.

What we are seeing is evidence that God himself has been there, in your heart. For most the sign seems old, because God himself created that faith in you long ago in the waters of Baptism.

When our text says that ***“no one can say 'Jesus is Lord'”*** it is not talking about just pronouncing those three words. Any pagan could do that. What unbelievers cannot do is to speak those words as an accurate expression of what is inside of them. They cannot speak those words as a confession of faith and as an expression of the hope that fills their hearts.

This is part of how we know that the faith that currently exists in our hearts is evidence of God the Holy Spirit himself having visited us. Man cannot create faith in himself – which is exactly what our text is teaching us. ***“No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.”*** This section of

our text is evidence that God has visited us because it teaches us that we cannot create saving faith in our own hearts. God the Holy Spirit is the only one that can do that. If that faith is now present in your heart, God the Holy Spirit put it there, created it there. God the Holy Spirit has visited you.

Learn to recognize something else here. This is evidence not only that God has visited you, but that he cares about you. He wants you with him in heaven for all eternity or he wouldn't have bothered to create saving faith in your heart in the first place. Next time you are tempted to imagine that God is far from you, or that he really isn't concerned with what is going on in your life, look again at his footprints in your heart. Look and be reminded that he loved you enough not only to send his Son to suffer and die for you, but to send the Holy Spirit into your heart and to awaken you from your death-sleep. The fact that God has performed such a miracle in you – transferring you from death to life – is evidence of love and concern, not animosity and indifference.

Yet for most of you, that's the *old* sign. It indicates something that for most was accomplished long ago. Where then is the evidence that our God still cares today? How do we know that he didn't just visit us, long ago, and has since given up on us?

Look carefully at the sign again and understand what you are actually seeing. The sign isn't all old. Much of it is as fresh as today. In fact what we are really looking at is not so much a single set of divine footprints as it is a well-worn path. God did not just visit once. He lives there, in your heart. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: ***“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price.”*** Again from Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:16: ***“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?”***

Just as you and I cannot create faith in ourselves, so we cannot sustain it. Therefore the very fact that you still have faith in Jesus Christ is evidence that that same Holy Spirit that brought you to faith is still living and active within you. He didn't just pass through your heart long ago. He long ago took up residence there.

Our text compels us to look at one other bit of evidence in our hearts, one other sign that indicates that God himself has visited us. Look carefully at the gifts and abilities that you possess and know that it is God alone who has given them to you. Our text put it this way: ***“Now***

there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” Every single gift that you possess is therefore a divine footprint in your heart, in your life. Why did he give you what he did? Our text answers: **“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”** By **“manifestation of the Spirit”** our text is talking about sign – divine evidence that the Holy Spirit has visited and blessed you.

The fact is every single human being hearing or reading these words has been showered with a variety of gifts – which is evidence of the existence of God in our lives. Unfortunately, Christians have a disturbing tendency to downplay the very real gifts they have been given, usually because they are busy looking at the gifts of others – gifts or attributes they believe they have *not* been given. Paul addressed this when he spoke of how important it was for each part of the "body of Christ" to do what it was designed to do. The foot cannot see, but neither can the eye walk. Our text lists some gifts that were specific to the Corinthian congregation of the 1st Century, but there are others, like wisdom, knowledge, and faith. Through Peter we are taught how valuable in God's sight is **“a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.”** ^{ESV(1 Peter 3:4)} In Romans 12, Paul mentioned gifts of service, gifts of encouragement, gifts of teaching, generosity in giving, leadership, zeal, mercy, and cheerfulness. ^{ESV(Romans 12:7-8)} Some can build, some can repair, others have an amazing gift to be able to open up and talk to strangers.

Look carefully then at the tracks that God has left in your heart – the sign he left there in the form of gifts – and recognize what you have been given and why you have been given it. The "why," again, is so that you might use those gifts **“for the common good.”** Your God fully expects that you will use whatever he has given you to glorify him alone and to serve your neighbor.

The bottom line is that your God is not far from you. He is right there, living within you. The evidence is obvious, and therefore also ought to be extremely comforting - if we will but take the time to look carefully with the eyes of faith. That same God who sent his Son to pay the full penalty for your sins, that same God that cared enough to bring you to faith and who day by day preserves that same faith within you – that is the God that even now lives within you. Learn then to recognize his presence and his on-going gifts. You are his own. You have been bought with a price – the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, which has now cleansed you from all sin and transformed you into an heir of heaven. Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 62:1-5** For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. ² The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. ³ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴ You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. ⁵ For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

ESV **John 2:1-11** On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

ESV **1 Corinthians 12:1-11** Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. ⁴ ¶ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For 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 ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.



ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Second Sunday after Epiphany – January 16, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 132 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"O God of God, O Light of Light"

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

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

The First 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 23 (Supplement Page 36)

The Second 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 Savior Jesus. God grant to each of us thankful hearts that are dedicated to his service.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – (Supplement page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 415 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Lo, Many Shall Come from the East and the West"

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

"Neither Miss, nor Misunderstand, the Signs"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 415 (Stanzas 5-7) (Red Hymnal)

"Lo, Many Shall Come from the East and the West"

Installation of 2022 Church Council

The Prayers of the Day followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 132 (Stanza 5) (Red Hymnal)

"O God of God, O Light of Light"

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 and around the world. 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 – Sunday (26) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Pierre
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/Holy Communion
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Prof. John Ude is considering the call to Living Savior of Eden Prairie. Grace Lutheran School of Valentine has called Teacher Andrew Roehl. Teacher Nathan Wales has accepted the call to Grace Lutheran School of Sleepy Eye. Pastor Luke Bernthal is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven.

Church Council Installation and Meeting – The 2022 Church Council is scheduled to be installed during this morning's service. The 2022 officers are: Mick Johnson – President, Mark Johnson – Vice President, Keith Mantz – Treasurer, Phil Pfennig – Secretary, Gary Miller – Financial Secretary, and Brian Fettig – Trustee Coordinator. The Council is also scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour following the service.

Lay Service – Since as of last night Pastor Roehl is under the weather, our service this morning is being presented by one of our laymen.

CLC Basketball Tournament – Prince of Peace of Hecla has a team going to Eau Claire and has invited members of St Paul to join them. The Tournament is March 11-13. Please see Pastor Roehl if you have a student in grades 5-8 that would like to participate.

Care Package – The WF is gathering products for a care package for one of our out-of-town members, to be sent in three weeks.