**Sermon 4/7/19**

**1 Corinthians 12:1-11**

Herbert Jackson was a missionary.

When he arrived at the city which was to be the location of his mission work,

       the local natives gave him a car so he could get around the area.

Although the car was new, and it did have one serious problem:

          it would not start without a push.

Herbert pondered this problem and finally came up with a plan.

He went to the local school near his home, and received permission to have a of few

          children come and give his car a push before classes started each morning.

As he traveled throughout the area, he would either park on a hill,

            or leave the engine running so he would not be stuck.

For two years he managed to get around the city and the surrounding area.

But then he began to have some health problems,

           and he needed to return to the states for treatment.

Before he left, a new missionary came to replace him.

Of course, the car would be staying with the new missionary.

Herbert began to explain his arrangement for getting the car started each morning,

          and keeping it going throughout the day.

The new missionary listen carefully, and then he began looking under the hood.

In just a few moments he called out:

          “Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable.”

He gave the cable a twist, climbed into the car, turned the key,

           and to Jackson's astonishment, the engine roared to life.

For 2 years, the only trouble with that car was a loose connection.

The power was there all the time.

But the car was not fully connected to the power, causing delays and difficulties.

The church in Corinth was a relatively new church.

And the Corinthian Christians

           were a very difficult and problematic collection of people

They could find a way to confuse and abuse everything, and they did so constantly.

Paul had carefully struggled to teach them about the ways of God,

          but this rowdy congregation tended to stray from his instructions

          and caused constant problems.

There were arguments, divisions, lawsuits, and immorality.

There was confusion about marriage, food sacrificed to idols, worship,

              the Lord's Supper, the resurrection, and, spiritual gifts.

Paul did not want them to be uninformed about the spiritual gifts

              God gives to each one of us.

So he wrote to them at great length, explaining in several places,

            how they should put these gifts to work.

Spiritual gifts are given to each of us by the Holy Spirit to build up the Church,

             and to strengthen and encourage one another.

But the Corinthians began to take pride in these gifts.

They bragged that their gifts were better and more important

            than the gifts others received.

Like Herbert Jackson's car, they had a loose connection.

The power was there.

But the people were not connected to God's power.

It is easy to criticize the Corinthians for their lack of understanding,

          and for their abuse of the gifts the Spirit gave to them.

As we read the stories of the people in the Bible we discover they also

          often found it hard to understand the gifts, talents, and power God gave them.

If you ever wonder how in the world God could use you to change the world,

           take a closer look at all the characters in the Bible.

Like the Corinthians, this odd group of ne'er-do-wells and has-beens,

          failed followers and despairing church leaders, found hope,

          not in their performance, but in god's never failing love and forgiveness.

We have been given gifts from God for the sake of God's Kingdom,

                   and we have also often failed to put those gift to work as God planned.

We are to put God's gifts to work to encourage one another, love one another,

                pray for each other, serve each other, and honor one another.

Yet how often do we put his gifts on the shelf and fail to put them to work.

Take a close look at God's people throughout the centuries.:

           Abraham who didn't always tell the truth, Jonah who tried to hide from God;

           Elijah, the prophet who pouted; Jacob, the wheeler-dealer;

         Gomer, the prostitute; the disciples who just didn't get it,

         the Corinthians who abused God's gifts, and all of us who have misunderstood.

The lesson is clear. God used, and still uses today, people to change the world.

People, not perfect saints or superhumans or geniuses, but ordinary people,

          like you and me.

Crooks, creeps, lovers, murderers, liars, and sinners,

        the confused, the lazy, the conceited, the braggers, God uses us all.

If you ever wonder how God can use you to make a difference in your world,

          just look at those he has already used, and take heart.

God gives us the gifts needed to make a difference.

He invites us to put these gifts to work, he wants us to put these gifts to work.

He gives us the power to change the way things are.

It is good to read the words of Paul and

            see the mistakes the Corinthians were making.

Because we often make the same mistakes.

You are important to God. You have been given his power.

When we put his gifts to work, we matter, we can make a difference.

A well-known conductor was holding a rehearsal one night

               with a vast array of musicians and a hundred-voice choir.

While the mighty chorus sang out, the horns blared, and the cymbals clashed.

Sitting far back in the orchestra, the piccolo player thought to herself,

               "With all these loud instruments, it doesn't matter what I do.

                They don't need me."

And so she stopped playing.

Suddenly the conductor stopped the music and looked right at the piccolo player.

He said, "It doesn't sound right without you. If you don't play, the concert's off.

                 We need you."

Things don't go right when we do not put God's gifts to work.

If we don't play our part, it makes a difference.

God wants us to use the gifts he has given us.

We matter to him, and we matter to the world around us.

You are needed in God's church.

God has gifted you and he wants to use you.

Don't allow yourself to think you don't matter.

Nobody is a nobody in the body of Christ.

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.

There are several lists of spiritual gifts throughout the Bible.

These are simply examples.

There are many spiritual gifts which are not mentioned in the Bible,

                   but are still important.

Put them to use, to build up the church,

               and to change the lives of everyone around you.

But remember, God is the one who is in control.

We are his church, his people, his children, and he gives us gives his service.

God does not give gifts as a reward for how well a Christian lives their life.

He gives spiritual gifts so we can help each other.

When God calls you to do a certain something,

           He will give you the gifts, skills, and ability, to accomplish it.

God is not expecting you to do something you are not capable of doing.

God is expecting you to do what he has already equipped you to do.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven He promised the disciples:

            "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;

             and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all of Judea and Samaria,

            and to the ends of the earth."

When the Holy Spirit came upon the believers at Pentecost,

they immediately began to speak and act differently,

and the church began to grow.

Put the power God has given you to work.

And see what a difference it can make.

AMEN