In 1983 then President Ronald Reagan signed a letter of declaration to declare every 3rd Monday in the month of January as Federal holiday commemorating the life and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1994, the Congress and the former President Bill Clinton further declared this day as a *National Day of Service*. Instead of a “day-off”, it shall be a “day-on” helping others and performing some kind of charitable service or act of kindness to the community. *The MLK Day of Service empowers individuals, strengthens communities, bridges barriers, creates solutions to problems in our society, and moves us one step closer to the reality of Dr. King's dream and vision of a "Beloved Community."[[1]](#footnote-1)*

As a community activist dedicated his entire life towards social justice advocacy and reform, King strived to motivate others to make a difference in the community however great or small. We’re not being ask to move a mountain overnight but instead make a difference in somebody’s lives one person at a time. That’s the challenge King proposed back then, as it is still applicable for us today.

If King were still alive today, he would’ve been 90 years old this year, but instead millions still commemorate his legacy and vision that he left behind - a “beloved community” that is still a work-in-progress. We’ve come so far, but yet there are still more works to be done, or sometimes even taken a few steps backward. Out of the many inspiring speeches that King had made, the one that intrigued me the most was the sermon that he gave at his home church – the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta on February 4th, 1968…exactly two months before his death. That sermon was entitled “*The Drum Major Instinct*”.

In that sermon, King spoke about one’s call in exercising his or her own gifts in the service of others, for the advancement of society and community all around us. We must not look upon our personal achievement or accomplishment, but instead upon the lasting impact that we made upon others. King spoke, “*Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don’t have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don’t have to know Einstein’s theory of relativity to serve. You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve.* ***You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love****.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

King’s idea of leadership is not whoever can speak the loudest, make the most noise, call attention of others upon himself or elevate herself above the others, but instead a good leadership shall be willing to make the sacrifice for others and to take the lead by example for others. According to King, greatness is neither elitist nor exclusive. It’s not meant to elevate ourselves above others based upon our own achievements or privileges. But rather, each person shall reach for his or her potential in achieving greatness because every person has something unique to offer and contribute to the greater society through our services to others.

King sees service as the great equalizer that eliminates our social divisions that we often differentiate ourselves, just as Christ taught us to *“love God first and foremost, and then, love our neighbors as ourselves.”* Each of us are gifted and our gifts ought to be valued, recognized, and appreciated by others.

Just as we read last week that Jesus was willing to let everyone else be baptized first before him, he demonstrated his humility and set an example for us to emulate. **That’s exemplary leadership…leadership from behind and not upfront. Jesus demonstrated that leadership is not based upon entitlements, power or authority over others, but instead upon influence and integrity that inspire and transform others.**

In our text this morning taken from Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, Paul also introduced us to a set of tools for leadership – the gifts of the Holy Spirit. By the virtue of our baptisms, these gifts were inherited to us and were made available for our uses. Some, however, may be gifted more than the others…but nevertheless EVERYONE is gifted in some ways and fashions, EACH according to our abilities, as God allocates. The challenge before us is that we recognize these gifts that we already possess and to use them to their fullest potentials.

As Paul wrote ***“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”[[3]](#footnote-3)***

This is a beautiful description of what the body should be like, as we discover and share our individual gifts for the purpose of the common good. In the context of Paul’s letter, the early church community was encouraged to share their spiritual gifts with one another and to use them for the glory of God and for the community. He recognized that we are all made uniquely different, we also belong in the same body and serving the same God.

**The purpose of these gifts is not to glorify or promote ourselves, but instead we ought to exercise them in order to build up the community for the common good.** We all sail in the same boat, live through the same struggles and face the same challenges. Therefore, we shall support one another instead of compete against one another.

Earlier this week, I participated in the Mayor’s annual Interfaith Breakfast event out in the NY Public Library in midtown Manhattan. Various leaders across the ecumenical faiths throughout the city gathered in one place and lifted up our common prayers among the citizens of this city that we live. We recognize that we all bring to the table certain skills, passions, visions, and hope for the greater good of our society. It was a wonderful display of unity across the religious spectrum, as we painted a beautiful mosaic of how we can all live together, pray together, learn from and work with one another, celebrating the gift of unity in the midst of our diversity, as we strive to **co-exist, co-operate,** and **co-habitat** with one another, for the greater good of our society.

Throughout his message to the Corinthians, Paul emphasized the importance of building bridges and not divisions while we foster the spirit of unity within the body of Christ. “*For just as the body is one and have many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

The church in Corinth took great pride of themselves while failing to see their diversity as a gift and what they may bring to the table together to share. Paul emphasized that even though they were Greeks or Jews, slaves or free, males or females, rich or poor, they were ALL united by their shared confession in Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Corinthians claim their spiritual superiority among themselves. They established hierarchy, classes, and divisions based on their spiritual “giftedness”, readiness, or qualifications. Some claimed that because they’ve been there longer that the others, therefore they were “holier” than others, or they should have more saying or exerting greater influence and authority over the others. Paul rebuked those claims saying, “NO, NO, NO! That’s NOT how we should see ourselves or treat one another, as a unified body of Christ. We shall lay aside these criteria that differentiate and classify us and prayerfully discern the calling of the Spirit while focusing our minds and our hearts on Christ and Christ alone.

Unity is the central theme throughout Paul’s ministry to the early churches back in the 1st century, as it is for our churches today. There have been too many fractures and divisions among our churches, dishonoring our calls for unity and squandering our resources and energies upon power and authority. Sadly, the body of Christ is still being crucified each day whenever disunity and division arise. **Lord, forgive us! For we know not what we do**.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Later on, we will be having our Annual Congregational Meeting. Part of our meeting we will be discerning the will of the Holy Spirit as we elect those who are being called to serve as leaders of the church (whether as elders or deacons). We thank God for the leading of this congregation over the years, while we shall remain humble in seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit, casting our vision and hopes upon God’s hands. As the saying goes, **no one knows what our future holds, for as long as we know the One who holds it.**

This is also a time for us to reflect upon our own calling – both individually and collectively as a member of this body. ***What brings us here every Sunday? Why is God calling us to be a part of this community? What gifts have we been blessed with from God and what gifts are we willing to share and contribute for the greater good of the body of Christ?***

These are vital questions that we must ask ourselves as Christ affirms us to “*remain in him, as he also remains in us. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can we bear fruit unless we remain in him.”[[7]](#footnote-7)*

Therefore let us love one another and share our gifts with one another for the upbuilding of the body of Christ.As Proverbs 18:16 tells us that ***“a gift opens doors; it gives access to the great.”***  When we unwrap God’s spiritual gifts within us, God will reveal to us greater opportunities and purposes that are set for us. Through the Spirit, God has promised to lead us with endless possibilities, if we are willing to submit and surrender ourselves before God.

May the Spirit guide us and lead us as we lay our trust into God’s faithfulness. Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *http://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/MLKDay/* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 'The Drum Major Instinct' delivered at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, February 4, 1968* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *I Corinthians 12:4-7* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *I Corinthians 12:12* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Galatians 3:28* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Luke 23:34* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *John 15:4* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)