

[BLANK] [PRAYER] As I prepared for this Sunday’s worship, we had an ice storm brewing. I knew that we had a pretty good chance of canceling our worship service. If you were able to come, I am glad for that, and I am also glad for those who chose to stay home. We all want to be part of God’s common good, but sometimes we have to express that common good in ways that reflect God’s loving concern for our safety, as much as anything else.

It has been a joyful month of worship so far. [MAGI] We celebrated the coming of the Magi to Jesus on our first Sunday, They came to find a king, and they found not a person of power and wealth, but Jesus, a humble child, born of humble people. Jesus transformed their hearts, and sent them home another way - the way of Jesus. The Magi became part of God’s common good born of Jesus, for all of God’s creation. [BAPTISM] Last Sunday, we renewed our baptism covenant with God, remembering Jesus in the waters of the Jordan river, being baptised by John, along with people seeking God’s grace. God’s Holy Spirit came down on Jesus, and God said God was pleased with Jesus seeking God’s common good with God’s people. [BLANK]

On this Human Relations Sunday, there’s a theme here, it seems, Amen? Jesus came not just for a specific group of people, but for everyone. Faith in Jesus Christ is about entering, and serving, a common good. Jesus invites not just a few elect people into God’s salvation, but everyone. It’s a simple idea, but here we are, two thousand years later, struggling as people in God’s creation to carry out God’s common good. God wants no person left behind in God’s plan of salvation. Why is that so hard for us to do?

[COUNCIL] I have been attending our City Council meetings in recent months, supporting the funding of neighborhood policing initiatives. Our police substation just down the street is closed, because of city budget cuts. It broke my heart to see our city walk away from this effort to create a common good in our neighborhoods. When neighbors and police work together to create a common good, there will be more peace, and more justice, rather than less, at a lower cost to everyone. Research from decades of neighborhood policing has proven this, again and again. It’s not a matter of being right about this issue: it’s a matter of walking the talk of God’s righteousness, inviting everyone to love God with all of our hearts, and everyone as ourselves for real, not just in words. [BLANK]

In today’s reading from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, one of the first churches in Greece, Paul spells out a common good for people who had trouble believing that a common good was worth much at all. Corinth was an “anything goes” kind of city, in many ways. You can see this in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians - he takes on a long list of problems in the church, mostly about everyone doing their own thing, either alone, or in little cliques.

In this week’s reading, Paul tries to pull together their church into a common good, a good that’s defined by the gifts of God’s Holy Spirit. We may all have our individual gifts, given to us by God in the Holy Spirit, but what we can do individually is not all that much, compared to people with hearts at peace seeking God’s common good. [SPIRIT] Paul’s first insight is that God’s Holy Spirit is the same for everyone, even if we receive

different gifts from the Spirit. If we sense our personal gifts given by God, that's great, but being touched by God is never just about our individual experience. To be touched by God's Holy Spirit means that we're touched by the God who touches everyone together, for a common good. We are touched by God for a greater purpose, not just to feel good about ourselves, and we need discipleship, with other people touched by God, to be a part of God's common good.

[WORK PRAYER] Paul then points out that the Holy Spirit is not just for feeling, but for doing. God's Holy Spirit calls us to use our spiritual gifts in ministry, to make a difference in the world for God. There are many ministries that serve God's common good, but one Lord of those ministries - Jesus. If we think that our own ministry is the complete story of God's common good, remember that we all need to be obedient to Christ in ministry, through God's Holy Spirit. We need to listen to, and follow, Jesus, together, to find God's common good, even when our ministries are different. It takes compassion, and common discipleship in Jesus, to do this, but it's worth it.

[AWAKENING] Paul then points out that when we are touched by the Spirit with gifts of faith, and use them in ministry, the Spirit will call us to have an awakening to our new relationship with Jesus. God appears not just around us, but in us, and starts to give us new feelings about who we are, and how we are. And yet, Paul reminds us, these awakenings are not about just a personal relationship with God. There is one God, who wants to save the whole world, who stirs the awakening of God in our hearts, so that we can begin to see how much God wants us to be a part of a common good, for the good of everyone, not just us.

[CLARITY] It is this awakening to our deep connections to God and to one another for a common good that finally begins to give us a clear revealing of God's Holy Spirit in us. We see not just God, but all of God's children, in the beautiful plan that God has for everyone. Paul emphasizes that this clarity of our connection to God in God's Spirit is the direct result of us seeking to serve God's common good. If you have a personal revelation, that's wonderful, but as Paul himself knew, a personal revelation is just the start of a journey of seeking God's common good in the hearts of everyone. [BLANK]

In our nation, and in our world, the common good of God often takes a back seat to personal good, or a good for some, but not for all. [KING] Tomorrow we observe the birthday of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In Dr. King's letter from a jail in Birmingham, Alabama, Dr. King reminded church leaders in Birmingham that a common good can seem inconvenient to people who are more interested in their own good. The churches of Birmingham wanted Dr. King to find a more convenient time, a more convenient way, to advocate for justice in that city, a city that had, in 1963, more unsolved murders of African Americans than any other city in the nation. Dr. King knew that change for God's common good meant revealing their commitment to God's common good clearly, to all of God's world. Echoing Paul's words to the Corinthians, Dr. King said, [QUOTE] "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. " [BLANK]

It is now almost fifty-six years since Dr. King wrote these words. His words are no less true today than they were then. The truth is that our failure to respond to God’s Holy Spirit, calling us to deliver God’s justice for all in this world, continues to tear at our fabric of destiny. Christian faith calls us to a deep and indestructible sense of God’s common good, so that God’s fabric of common destiny can take shape, in whatever form God’s love needs it to take shape. The shape of God’s common good doesn’t look like one political party’s common good, one race’s common good, one culture’s common good, one nation’s common good, one church’s common good, one family’s common good. The shape of God’s common good looks like humble hearts, surrendered to ministry in Christ, through God’s gifts of the Holy Spirit, working together, day by day, with any and every child of God, to bring God’s common good to earth, as it is in heaven.

My family in Christ, we are called to be the body of Christ for God’s common good, anointed with gifts from God’s Holy Spirit, called to ministry in God’s Holy Spirit, awakened to our connection to God and God’s world in God’s Holy Spirit, so that we can have God reveal clearly to us, and to all of God’s world, a common good, born of God, formed in Jesus Christ, alive in God’s Holy Spirit, for us, and for all generations. There is another way that we are to follow in Christ this year, the way of Jesus, the way of a common good, for us, for all of God’s world, and for all of God’s Creation, now, and forever. Make this your call to discipleship. Be touched by God’s gifts of the Spirit. And use them, in Christ, together. Amen.