

## 1 Corinthians 12:1; 4-11

“Who do you play for?”

1 Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don't want you to misunderstand this. 4 There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. 5 There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. 6 God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. 7 A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. 8 To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. 9 The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. 10 He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. (repeat vs. 7) 11 It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

Recently my wife, Cara and I were talking about all the things that have to be done in a church. And, we talked about all the needs the church has in order for its ministries to make a real difference in the world.

As we talked, Cara said very honestly, “You know, when we were laypersons at Aldersgate, I never wondered how the church got cleaned, or how the grass got mowed, or how the power bill was paid so that I could enjoy climate controlled worship.

“I never wondered about how the pews and sanctuary got straightened after worship, or how the beautiful music just seemed to “happen” on Sunday mornings.

“I never thought much about the fact that there was always someone in the nursery to take care of our children when I came to church, or that the Food Pantry Collection Barrel always seemed to be full, though I had not contributed to it.” And then Cara said, “I just took so much for granted!”

Many of you have been members of the church for a long time. And, when you joined the church, you made an important vow to support the church in very specific ways. This support is what we often refer to as “Stewardship.”

One of my favorite short definitions for Stewardship is “caretaker.” A good steward “takes care” of the things God has made him or her responsible for, isn’t that right?

When I meet with visitors who are interested in becoming a member of the church, I share with them the important vow that they will make to the church, and I stress to them that as new members of the church, they are expected to be faithful in their stewardship and support of the church.

Let’s take a moment to look again at this important vow all of us have taken as members of the church. Will you please turn with me to page 38 in your hymnal? (Share vow).

Although our current hymnal doesn’t reflect this, as of January 1, 2009 the membership vows now specifically state, “A member of the United Methodist church will be loyal to Christ, and do all in their power to strengthen the church by faithfully participating in its

ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.”

In today’s world of consumerism, it seems that many join a church for what it can do for them. I don’t mean to sound judgmental by making these observations, but in my 13 years of ministry as a pastor, I have come to realize that some folks don’t join a church as a means of serving God and others.

Some join the church to have access to childcare through the nursery, Sunday school, Preschool, and United Methodist Youth Fellowship. Some join the church to have access to social activities and networking opportunities through Sunday school and worship. Some join a church because their career path dictates maintaining a certain social status by attending a certain church.

Others join to get their “guilt card” stamped, or to receive a tax write off for their generous donations. I have even had folks join the church just to have a place to get married. Now, I know you all can’t believe anyone would join the church for any of those reasons because they are not why the church exists, isn’t that right?

God is the one who has instituted “covenant” community. God is the one who has called believers together for the purpose of worshipping him, and for the purpose of living in a distinctive way that honors him, and that represents him, to those who are not part of the community.

I want to take a moment to remind us of just what a covenant is. A **covenant** is a mutual agreement, or contract, or promise between two persons or parties, with conditions and consequences spelled out.

In the Old Testament of God’s Word, we learn that God called a covenant community together when he freed his people from their

slavery in Egypt. God gave to these people his laws, including the Ten Commandments.

God promised to lead, guide, and care for his people, *if* they would worship Him, and only him, and obey his laws. We know from the Scriptures that the people did not obey God in the ways He called them to, and God punished them for their disobedience.

In the New Testament of God's Word, we learn that God has called a *new* covenant community together. In the new covenant that God offers to us, He writes his law on our hearts, rather than on tablets of stone. And that is exactly what we need isn't it?

Until God writes his laws on our hearts, transforming us from the inside out by the presence and power of his Holy Spirit within us, sin is engraved on our hearts, and we find that we continually disobey God and his law.

The foundation of the new covenant that God offers to us **is** Jesus Christ. Through faith in Jesus – faith in his sacrificial death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and faith in his resurrection from the dead as King of kings and Lord of lords – God offers to us a unique and personal relationship, where we are made right again with God. In this new relationship with God by faith in Christ, we are forgiven of sin, and we have the promise of eternal life at Christ's return.

That is God's side of this new covenant commitment. So, what is ours? When we turn our lives over to Christ our Lord, God, by his Holy Spirit, builds into us a desire to obey Him, and his law. We become part of a covenant community who seeks to live holy lives, representing the one true God to the rest of the world. We make up the new covenant community known as Christ's church!

Now, we all need to understand something very important. If you have trusted in Christ for your salvation, then God has called you to be an important part – a committed part – of your covenant community – your family in Christ. And, God has given you specific gifts that He expects you to use in your church so that He might accomplish His purposes through you.

Let me ask you to consider two questions at this point. First, are you a committed part of your church family? Secondly, are you faithfully using your spiritual gifts and talents so that God might work through you to accomplish His purposes?

How many of you saw the 2004 movie “Miracle?” This movie was based on the true story of the 1980 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid. In the movie, Kurt Russell stars as hockey coach, Herb Brooks, who assembles a U.S. team of underdogs. No one thinks they will succeed, as they are up against the previously undefeated Soviet hockey team.

Brooks selects a preliminary roster of 26 men – later to be cut to a final roster of 20. During the initial practice, tempers flare as forward, Rob McClanahan and defenseman, Jack O'Callahan get into a fight based on an old college rivalry.

Coach Brooks bluntly tells the players that they are to let go of old rivalries, and start becoming a team. He calls for introductions, in which each player states his name, his hometown, and for whom he plays. The coach then starts the team on an exhausting conditioning drill, in which the team sprints together, back and forth across the ice, over and over and over.

During the team's exhibition game against the Norwegian National Team in Oslo that ends in a 3–3 tie, Brooks notices the players are distracted by pretty girls in the stands, and not playing up to their

potential. After the game, in a wrenching scene, he makes them run drills back and forth across the ice far into the night. After each pass across the ice, the coach asks the team, “Who do you play for?”

When they are absolutely exhausted and cannot possibly run another drill, the coach asks again, “Who do you play for?” to which forward Mike Eruzione responds with the answer that coach Brooks had wanted to hear all along, “I play for the United States of America!” With that, the drills are ended.

The coach had finally helped his team to understand that they weren’t playing for themselves. They were committing themselves to a new team, for a specific goal, and their commitment had to be nothing less than 100% if they were going to win.

The Americans are considered overwhelming underdogs to the Soviets in the first medal round game. In the second period the Soviets score a goal, now leading 3 – 2. Early in the final period the Soviet team is called for a penalty, giving the Americans a man advantage.

Mark Johnson scores his second goal of the game just as the penalty is about to expire. Later Eruzione enters the game and scores to give the US a 4-3 lead. At this point, the entire team skates onto the ice as the crowd celebrates.

After a long, intense and suspenseful 10 minutes, the clock ticked down the final few seconds, in which commentator Al Michaels said his now famous words, “Do you believe in miracles?” Two days later, the US team would go on to defeat Finland to win the gold medal.

Friends, our Lord Jesus Christ has called each of us to be a committed part of his covenant community, the church. When you joined the church you made a promise to support it 100%. Each of us

has been given a spiritual gift, by our “Coach,” that we are to use in an effort to win the victory. **PAUSE**

If you have ever played team sports, you can easily identify those players who are not giving 100%, and when this happens, **the whole team is affected!** And, in a game like football, we can't all be quarterbacks or punters. Each player plays a specific position, and they must play it to the best of their ability, **for the benefit of the whole team**, right?

Each of us has been blessed by God with different gifts that we are to use to help build up and support our team, the church. Each of you must use your gifts and talents to build up and support Aldersgate United Methodist Church if you are going to be successful in honoring your Lord and representing Him to the world.

Friends, before we conclude our worship this morning, let me ask you just more two important questions, “Who do you play for?” And, “Are you giving 100% to your commitment to Christ and His church?” May God bless you all, Amen.