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The Day of Pentecost

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Christ chose Pentecost, the traditional Jewish harvest festival, to be the birthday of his New Testament Church. By pouring out his Holy Spirit, Christ empowered the Church to gather in the great harvest of souls won by his life, death, and resurrection. This third great celebration of the Christian year, along with the birth of Jesus and his resurrection, encourages us to rejoice in our tasks in ministry and to value the Spirit's gifts to carry them out.

Sermon

1 Corinthians 12:3-11

Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Introduction – The apostles knew the Holy Spirit was coming. Jesus talked about the coming of the Spirit often enough. But I doubt they figured the Spirit would come the way he did on Pentecost: All at once a sound like the blowing of a volent wind, what seemed to be tongues of fire, foreign words coming out of their mouths that they had never been trained to speak. Luke tells us in Acts that they were all filled with Holy Spirit. Amazing.

That isn't the Holy Spirit's usual way of operating. We don't notice the Spirit all that much. The Bible has a lot more to say about the Father and Son than about the Holy Spirit. Even in church the Holy Spirit only gets one day a year—on Pentecost. A Bible commentator wrote a book entitled "The Holy Spirit: Shy Member of the Trinity." That's kind of what the Spirit is. Not shy like embarrassed or insecure, but shy like deferential. The Spirit defers to Jesus. He wants our attention to be on the cross and the empty tomb. That was always the plan. Jesus told the apostles, **The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.** So that's what the Spirit does, so quietly and so gently that we hardly notice.

Quietly and gently for sure, but the impact of the Spirit's work is just as awesome as it was on Pentecost. For me as a Christian, for you as a Christian, and for every Christian. Martin Luther put it this way: "The Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

That's exactly the truth St. Paul explains the Second Reading for today from 1 Corinthians 12. Paul's focus is the gifts of the Spirit, the gifts the Spirit gives to us and to other believers. Paul's words are going to help us understand these gifts and lead us to value them and use them in our lives. Here's the point:

The Holy Spirit Gives Gifts to the Church

1. The believers in Corinth were very gifted people and Paul recognized it: **You have been enriched in every way**, he wrote, **with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge**. But they were struggling and their strengths were becoming weaknesses and splitting the congregation. So this is how Paul began: **Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.**

He started with the basics, the most important gift the Spirit gives. **No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.** This is Bible knowledge 101. We cannot have faith in Jesus or confess our faith in Jesus without the gift the Holy Spirit gives us. Martin Luther explains again, "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel." The Bible is crystal clear on this. We are born, actually we are conceived, with the disease of sinfulness. You don't see the disease in a baby's sweet little face, but the disease is raging. The disease doesn't go away with growing up, either. The disease might be docile at times and maybe even dormant—people with diseases can live normal lives—but the disease of sinfulness will never look to Jesus as Savior, never sense his forgiveness, never feel his love. That's where we would be without faith. Without faith we would always say in some way, **Jesus be cursed** and we would never say in any way, **Jesus is Lord**. Faith is the gift of the Spirit. **No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.**

You and I have to think about this and we have to get this straight. If I would ask you, "Why are you a believer or why are you a Christian?" what would you say? Maybe you'd say, "I've been a Christian all my life" or maybe "my parents were Christian" or "I went to a Christian school" or "I married a Christian" or "I go to church every Sunday." Some people might say, "I made a decision for Christ when I was young." None of those answers gets this right. You and I believe in Jesus because the Holy Spirit worked a miracle on us and gave us the gift of faith. He implanted in our minds and hearts the ability and willingness to believe and be sure of the impossible. This miracle is just as supernatural as the miracle of creation; when the Holy Spirit created faith in us he turned our chaos into confidence. The miracle is just as spectacular as the miracle of the resurrection. When he gifted us with faith, the Spirit turned our death into life. We just don't see it. No mighty winds here; no flames of fire; just the gentle whisper of the Word and the quiet breeze of baptism and Holy Communion. This is how the Spirit works in us: he creates faith as a gift. And with faith he implants **love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**. He enables us to imitate Jesus.

2. St. Paul wanted the Christians in Corinth to understand one thing: You may have the gifts of the Spirit, but you can't just use your gifts as you jolly well please. If the gift of faith comes from the Spirit—and Paul had just reminded them that it does—then all their other gifts came from the Spirit, too. **There are different kinds of gifts, he wrote, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.** If the Spirit hands out all the gifts, he wants us to use our gifts as he plans. So Paul added, **Now to each one the gift of the Spirit is given for the common good.** The Spirit gives gifts to all of us and he expects all of us to use our gifts to strengthen believers and to win unbelievers.

Here at the beginning of chapter 12 Paul lists nine gifts of the Spirit. Toward the end of chapter 12 he lists nine more and they aren't all the same. When he wrote to the congregation in Rome he mentioned seven gifts and he mentioned four when he wrote to the Christians in Ephesus. The Spirit gives all kinds of gifts to believers. Some are extraordinary gifts which he gives to only a few. Some gifts make use of natural talents and abilities. The number of the gifts of the Spirit is really endless, but let's take a look at the gifts Paul mentions here.

To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit. Every believer has wisdom and knowledge. We all know the basics of Christian truth. We all know the good news about Jesus is central to faith. But the Spirit gives some the wisdom to speak the right words at the right time to believers who are struggling. He gives some the knowledge to teach basic truths in a logical and precise way. **To another**, Paul wrote, **faith by the same Spirit.** We all have faith, of course, but Paul is talking here about heroic faith, the kind of faith that bombards God with prayers and wrestles with him day and night. Paul adds **to another distinguishing between spirits.** This is the ability some have to detect the differences, even subtle differences, between truth and error. Pastors often have this gift, but some laypeople have this gift, too. All these gifts build up and strengthen believers.

The other five gifts Paul mentions catch our attention: **Gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, speaking in different kinds of tongues** and the **interpretation of tongues**. The Corinthian believers knew about these gifts and used them. We don't know much about them; we haven't seen them or experienced them. The ability to heal the sick, to speak a message gained directly from God, to speak in languages without training—those were all gifts that were important in the early years of the Christian Church. Little by little the Holy Spirit stopped handing out those gifts. The New Testament Scriptures replaced them and made them unnecessary. So we see that the Spirit gives gifts to the Church in different ways and at different times. Gifts to compose and play music or design and build churches or understand and use technology or keep records or create outreach strategies weren't important in Corinth or anywhere in the first century. These kinds of gifts are enormously important in the Church today. The Spirit is constantly creating gifts and giving gifts to believers so that the Church can be preserved and enlarged. Paul wrote: **All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.**

As I've gotten to know you personally over the past several years, I've seen gifts of the Spirit in all of you. I won't mention them from the pulpit, but I've seen them. The challenge for you is to see these gifts in yourself and to use them as the Spirit wants you to. The Spirit gives the gift of friendliness not only so you can greet your friends, but also so you can welcome visitors. The Spirit gives the gift of diligence-- you stick to a task--not only so you can keep your lives in order but also so you can discover ways to bring your family and friends to worship. The Spirit gives the gift of money not only so you can save for the future but also so you can support the spread of the gospel. The Spirit gives all kinds of gifts to the Church and he does so to preserve the Church and its people. And the Spirit has given each of you gifts to do just that.

Is the Holy Spirit really the shy member of the Trinity? Shy perhaps, but not timid. Quiet perhaps, but not silent. In his own way the Holy Spirit works through the gospel to give gifts to the Church--and to give gifts to you. Amazing! Amen.