

## OUR DIVERSE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

**TEXT:** Acts 2:1-21

Last Sunday, when we recognized Jesus' ascension into Heaven, if we were listening, we heard Jesus give us a hint as to what was in store for his disciples. And it wasn't just a passing phenomenon; it was something that was coming for them and for all believers in the future. Just as he ascended, Jesus told his disciples: "This is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So today we recognize the arrival of that Holy Spirit. We see that Jesus' words came to pass in the time he announced. Here it is. Today. Pentecost. That experience of the wind and the tongues-of-flame and the dove and the crowds hearing the sermon in their own language. We believe that the promise of Pentecost is deliverance, celebration, victory, and strength. The signs of Pentecost, after all, are mighty. And what is the Holy Spirit if it is not God's own agent – the very spirit of the resurrected Jesus – now on earth to accompany us with signs of wonder and power.

But, I also believe we should never expect things to be so easy. In the cross of Christ we see God's strength mediated through suffering. God's victory achieved through defeat, and new life pledged and provided through death. The crucified and resurrected God we meet in Jesus is a God of paradox, and so we should look for no less in God's Holy Spirit.

Think about it: without the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples could go back to their previous careers as fishermen. I can almost hear James and John explaining, "Sure, it was a wild and crazy three-year ride, and that Jesus sure was a heck of a guy, but maybe we needed to get that out of our system before we could settle down and take on Dad's business". However, once the Spirit comes, that return to normalcy is no longer an option. They will now be propelled throughout the ancient world to herald the unlikely message that God has redeemed the world through an itinerant preacher from the back

waters of Palestine who was executed for treason and blasphemy. The Holy Spirit, take note, doesn't solve the disciples' problems, it creates them.

*New York Times* columnist David Brooks recently challenged new college graduates to eschew the American obsession with self-fulfillment and instead find themselves in service to others by making and keeping what he described as sacred commitments and by rising to the challenges they discover all around and outside of them. "Most successful young people," he writes, "don't look inside and then plan a life. They look outside and find a problem, which summons their life...Most people don't form a self and then lead a life. They are called by a problem, and the self is constructed gradually by their calling."

I think this is exactly what the Holy Spirit was calling Jesus' disciples to do. He was not telling them to go back to their old lives now that their leader was gone. They were to see where life would take them in the wake of their incredible experience of the past few weeks. And, more than that, the Holy Spirit was giving them the spiritual gifts they would need for their new life in Christ.

Jesus had promised the Apostles that "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I told you." The first Christians experienced the fulfillment of this promise as the Spirit of God came upon them that first Pentecost in wind, fire, and voice. We need to remember, though, that what began at Pentecost continues in our own day because, while the Spirit does not always come in great signs and wonders as it did for the Apostles, the Holy Spirit is always present and active in individuals' hearts and in the life of the Church.

Saint Paul reminds us that, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). Pentecost is a celebration of possibilities, both for individual believers and for the

Church. The Pentecost of the first Christians was a witnessing of the power of the Spirit for the future.

This future is lived out in each of us in the little moments of our lives, when we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit. By being open to the Spirit, individually and in community, we can celebrate legitimate diversity based on giftedness and vocation and we can live a unity that is not afraid of questions, doubts, challenges, and possibilities. We are led outside of ourselves for the sake of others. Saint Paul reminds us that not all will speak in tongues, but each person, with unique gifts, is essential to the church.

If the gifts we have received are for the common good, then our Pentecost mission is to share our gifts and spend ourselves nurturing others, drawing them into the unity of the Spirit and the Church, and to open ourselves nurturing others, drawing them into the unity of the Spirit and the Church, and to open ourselves to the workings of the Spirit in the diversity of the gifts and lives of others.

So, what kinds of gifts do we receive from the Holy Spirit? The Bible actually has three such lists. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul identifies prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership and mercy. I think all of these are pretty self-explanatory, except perhaps prophesying, which literally means to “speak forth” or to declare and interpret the purposes of God, or to make known in any way the truth of God. The idea of telling the future was added sometime in the Middle Ages.

To the church in Corinth, Paul cites Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and helps.

Well, with all those options, I would think that each one of us could come up with one or two gifts that the Spirit has given each of us. For me, these gifts of the Spirit lead to three questions:

First, how does the diversity of gifts and perspectives within the Church inspire your faith?

Second, what gifts has the Holy Spirit given you to empower you to help build up the Church?

Third, when have you been blessed through the ministry and service of others? When has the kindness of others helped you feel less alone or isolated?

I know that we cannot each find the answers to these questions in the short time we have this morning. So I have given each of you a sheet to take home – yes, I’m giving you some homework. I have listed these questions for you to ponder in your quiet time. Then there is a list – certainly not exhaustive – of some of the Spiritual Gifts that the Spirit gives. I want you to take that out now and put it in your pocket or your purse – just so you won’t forget about it – and give it some prayerful thought this week. Which of these gifts might you have been given? Perhaps you have a gift that is not on this list. Make note of these and think about how you use your gifts. Then begin to pray about how you might use your gifts in your church or community. God has given us these extraordinary abilities, not to hide under a bushel or to stow away in a closet, but to use them in service to God and neighbor. Spiritual gifts are in effect as long as the Spirit fills us.

John Wesley encouraged Methodists to participate in the “Ordinances of God”, also called “Means of Grace”. They are the actions of Christians that keep them in relationship with Christ and exhibit their faith in their lives. By practicing these Ordinances – or Spiritual Gifts – we can maintain balanced, holistic, Spirit-filled lives.

The future of the church is lived out in each of us in the little moments of our lives, when we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit. By being open to the Spirit, individually and communally, we can celebrate legitimate diversity based on giftedness and vocation and we can live a unity that is not afraid of questions, doubts, challenges, and possibilities. We are led outside of ourselves for the sake of others. Saint Paul

reminds us that not all will speak in tongues, but each person, with unique gifts, is essential to the Church.

As individual believers and as a Church we have to seek out and heal those wounds that threaten the body of humanity, and the body of Christ. Fear, discrimination, war, disregard for life, bullying, and exploitation are among the many forces of evil that lead people away from community and into loneliness and isolation.

If the gifts we have received are for the common good, then our Pentecost mission is to share our gifts and spend ourselves nurturing others, drawing them into the unity of the Spirit and the Church, and to open ourselves to the workings of the Spirit in the diversity of the gifts and lives of others. Amen.

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. How does the diversity of gifts and perspectives within the Church inspire your Faith?
2. What gifts has the Holy Spirit given you to empower you to help build up the Church?
3. When have you been blessed through the ministry and service of others? When has the kindness of others helped you feel less alone or isolated?

### Some of the Spiritual Gifts:

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|----------------|----------------------|
| -Prophecy      | -Hospitality         |
| -Pastoring     | -Faith               |
| -Teaching      | -Leadership          |
| -Wisdom        | -Administration      |
| -Knowledge     | -Suffering           |
| -Exhortation   | -Healing             |
| -Discernment   | -Prayer Language     |
| -Giving        | -Interpretation      |
| -Helping       | -Apostleship         |
| -Mercy         | -Singleness          |
| -Mission       | -Intercessory Prayer |
| -Service       | -Martyrdom           |
| -Spirit Music  | -Battling            |
| -Craftsmanship | -Humor               |
| -Exorcism      | -Voluntary Poverty   |
| -Miracles      | -Evangelism          |

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