

1 Corinthians 12:3-11

Pentecost

May 28, 2023

Imagine being there in Jerusalem on Pentecost for the sights and sounds recorded in Acts 2. Or being one of those granted the ability to speak in different languages that you had never studied. It would leave a lasting impression. Also lasting were the effects of the day that continue to impact our lives and work. As we ponder the truths which the Apostle Paul shared with the believers in Corinth we see

THE SPIRIT CONTINUES TO COME

- I. Producing faith
- II. Granting gifts
- III. Prompting service

It is good that the Spirit continues to come, producing faith, because faith is not natural. Paul noted, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” That is the same lesson we learned in the Third Article of the catechism when Luther explained, “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.” Maybe you don’t remember that time if you were part of a Christian family, but you were born estranged from God. You came into the world a child of the devil. You had no interest in spiritual matters. You were lost in sin, an enemy of God.

That condition was evident in the opposition that the believers sometimes experienced. Paul spoke of someone saying, “Jesus be cursed.” That means bound for destruction by God. Non-believing Jews, that is, ones who rejected Jesus as the promised Savior, spoke in that manner against Christians. Gentile mobs picked up the phrase, too. Actually, anyone who does not preach Jesus as the source of our salvation is treating him that way, Martin Luther pointed out, whether it is by belief in some other god or looking to their own deeds to save them.

Although you did not naturally believe in Jesus, that has changed. The Holy Spirit entered your heart. It occurred in baptism for many of us. When water was applied in the name of the Triune God, the Spirit planted faith in your tiny heart. Your sins were washed away. You became a child of God. That was a miracle as much as Pentecost. Others came to faith later in life. The Word converted you. It happened by the same power of the same Spirit, with the same result.

You know Jesus Christ as Lord of all and Savior of your soul. The message of his work produced that faith. You became convinced Jesus is true God from eternity and true man, born as one of us to live as our substitute in perfect obedience to God’s law and to die in our place as the full payment for the original sin we were

born in and all those sins we committed in a life of disobedience in thought, word and deed. We realize there was no way we merited it but we now have the standing of holy in God's sight. We are thankful for his love and grace in providing it.

Planting faith is not the only deed that Spirit has performed. Did you ever have flowers or garden crops that did not produce a bloom or a vegetable? There are lots of ways that can happen. Maybe it was a late frost that killed the young plants or flooding water that washed away the seeds or stood there and drowned them out. Weeds can choke out the plants we want if we neglect the garden for a time or maybe we get out there and pull out the plants with the weeds. Critters can eat our plants—we have an abundance of rabbits. In the country I remember raccoons loving to ruin our sweet corn plot. For others it is deer. Pilfering neighbors can take your produce or drought conditions wither the plants and prevent a harvest. There is an untold number of obstacles. So it is with faith. Our trust in the Savior needs the nourishment of the Word and the power of the Spirit to maintain, strengthen and lead us to produce a crop of fruits of faith, lives serving and glorifying God. That is what I pray for each of you as the Spirit continues to come.

II.

As the Spirit works he is granting gifts. He distributes them to his people. Those who comprise the Christian Church, built on Jesus Christ, come in all shapes and sizes. We speak different languages, hail from all parts of the world, having varying looks, sizes, ages, interests and backgrounds. So it is not surprising that we have different gifts.

The terms Paul used reflect this variety. What is rendered as “gifts” shows that they are of a spiritual nature and come to us by grace. We had not lined ourselves up for them and they are not rewards we earned. The term “service” stressed their use. They are for honoring God and for advancing his kingdom, especially to bring God's message to more so the Spirit can work faith in them. “Working” is the background of our word “energy.” They are active forces, operating by the power the Spirit supplies.

Note that there is a sameness despite the variety. The text repeated the thought, “the same Spirit, ...the same Lord, ...the same God,” likely referring to the persons of the Trinity. The one source of these gifts is our God. The Spirit divides the gifts as he knows best and to carry out his plans.

This reminder of the one source points to the unity of Christians as we utilize the Spirit's gifts. The apostle's readers in Corinth needed such a message. They were endowed with many gifts but instead of drawing them together they became a source of division. Members started comparing themselves and the gifts they had

with others. They prided themselves on what they had that somebody else lacked. They ranked the gifts and boasted that they had the best ones. Their evaluation was in the reverse order of how Paul listed them here. So he began the chapter pointing to their pagan origin to humble them and cut down their conceit while the reminder of God's grace behind it all would rebuild the harmony needed.

Paul developed the thought further as he continued. He compared the church to a body with different parts. Each part of your body—eyes, ears, hands, feet, internal organs—has an important role; none can function effectively on its own. In the same way we believers need to use our gifts together as a team. The honor belongs to Christ our head. Praise the Spirit who grants your gifts, not yourself.

What a blessing where such unity, consideration and purpose exist! May God's goodness bestow gracious gifts and lead us to maintain our oneness as we thank him and employ them in his service!

III.

What the Spirit grants as he continues to come to us is prompting service. Serving is why he has given gifts to us. Take special note of the verse, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." The gifts are given "to each one." There is much to do so the gifts are given to all. They are not reserved for a select few or for a privileged class. "To each" means to everybody. No one is left out. If you deny you have any gifts and thus don't use what you have been given, a key component is missing. There is no such thing as an ungifted Christian.

The gifts are given "for the common good." The spiritual gifts are for the benefit of all. We serve one another as we serve Christ. The greatest good is the spiritual welfare of a person. We build up one another within our fellowship and reach out to those not knowing the Savior or not involved in congregational life.

Paul cited several examples of gifts the Lord bestowed. Some of them were specific to that time and place; others were for all time. He gives what is needed when and where it is useful. Starting the list were wisdom and knowledge. While they are related, each has its own impact. Wisdom is mastery of scriptural truths, the ability to see the reason for what God has told us and make connections between doctrines. Knowledge makes those truths one's own and applies them to make wise choices and judgments based on the known facts.

Faith here is not saving faith, for all Christians have that. Some individuals have a strong, unwavering confidence in God's power. They dare to do great things, even miraculous acts like walking on water, entering a lion's den or fiery furnace or

facing a giant. God's church needs visionary believers to urge us forward in mission.

Ability to do healings and miraculous powers were granted to the apostles as they went out with the Savior's message. It showed their connection with the Lord Jesus and that his power was behind them, a benefit for both the doer and those witnessing what happened.

The gift of prophecy involved a couple of gifts. Some within the early Christian church received direct messages from the Lord regarding the future. Teaching and explaining the Word was a more general type of the gift and continues to be important as we pass on its truths.

Distinguishing between spirits was useful as false prophets abound. All believers need to know the difference between what the Word says and teachings that go against its message and to follow only what is correct, but some are especially able to detect when a person is using terms with a different meaning and leading in a wrong direction. They sound the warning.

Tongues and interpretation closed the list. There were repetitions of the Pentecost gift of speaking in other languages that certainly aided outreach with the gospel. Even today there are some who are gifted in the use of languages even if they don't have the instantaneous ability to speak in them. Interpreters share the meaning if the language of the speaker is unknown to the group.

The list in the text is not exhaustive of everything the Spirit provides to God's people. He matches the gifts with the needs of each place and time. We have experienced such care during the pastoral vacancy at St. John's. Several of you stepped up and filled needed roles in leadership, service and material preparation and other tasks to keep the ministry going. Don't stop. Others have been ongoing in maintaining property, cleaning, providing music and teaching Sunday School. Support through prayers and offerings is valuable. If you have not been involved in service, discuss with your fellow Christians where your talents and interests are, identify your gifts and offer to use them.

Keep growing in faith, supporting and encouraging one another, serving and reaching out as the Spirit continues to come through the gospel of Jesus Christ.