

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Second Sunday after Epiphany (Series C)

Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

Caution! Holy Spirit at Work

January 20, 2019

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It doesn't matter if you watch a hockey game, a football game, a true football game(aka soccer), or whatever. At some point in time, a player will get a breakaway; a receiver will elude the coverage, a striker will get behind the defence, typically ending in a goal or touchdown being scored. It's always fun to listen to the sports commentators when things like this happen. Typically, you will hear them say something like, “well, someone really missed their assignment there”. In other words, some player wasn't doing what they were supposed to do. Coaches pull out their hair when that happens. Hey! You're the one who is supposed to be there to stop that winger flying down the ice. Hey, you're the safety. You're supposed to make sure that doesn't happen. And you, the linebacker—you're trained to tackle that running back. What happened? Why didn't you do what you are equipped to do?

In the world of professional sports, teams are organized around a group of individuals with special gifts, unique skills or distinct abilities that, when used in connection with the other players on the team, can make them powerful contenders. Teams work to take what the various players can do, and bring them all together for the common good.

We can see the church at work in the same way. Our text today focuses on God's gifts to His people; gifts that are given for the common good of His people in the church. The same Lord who provided so wonderfully at the wedding at Cana continues to provide what His people need. He gives them what they don't have. He gives them the best, and He gives in abundance. As the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church, He gives to His people the gifts and abilities that enable us to serve together in joy, and to work together under His grace for the mutual encouragement and strength we give to one another.

In the officers who serve; in the teachers who teach; in the servants who clean or the counters who record the offerings, we see the very truth of what Paul says in our text: *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* In everything we see happen among us, we see the Holy Spirit at work in this place and in the people of this church, to do great and wonderful things for the sake of Jesus Christ.

There are a group of people who specialize in a unique form of demolition known as implosion. Using explosives carefully placed and timed in sequence, these experts can bring a skyscraper to the ground in a matter of seconds, having it fold in on itself to become a pile of rubble—and keeping it from falling onto nearby buildings. The process is elaborate and involves great care. The workers know that they must show great care in handling the explosives. They must be concerned for one another. They must be concerned about properties around them, or how their work may impact others. Before a blast is set off, there must be great caution to ensure that no one is left in an area of danger. And then, with the flip of a switch, the power of the explosives is unleashed, creating a spectacular display.

While I have never been an eye-witness at an implosion, I have seen many examples of this on the news or in documentaries. It got me thinking about the way in which the Holy Spirit works in the church today. We know that God is omnipotent, which is just the fancy way of saying that God is all-powerful. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to a son, Mary wondered how this could happen, since she was a virgin. But Gabriel reminded her: ***“For nothing will be impossible with God.”*** (Luke 1:37, ESV) Maybe Mary had that thought in her mind when she came to Jesus to simply say, ***“They have no wine.”*** (John 2:3, ESV) Jesus showed that He is the God of unlimited power when He did the impossible—He changed plain water into the best of wines. Our God is an awesome God, the God who created the world and everything in it. He is the One who ***“upholds the universe by the word of his power.”*** (Hebrews 1:3, ESV)

Now Paul tells us that God unleashes His power in His Church. The Holy Spirit, we are told, carefully works to distribute His gifts to His people. In His wisdom, the One Spirit works to lay out all that the church needs for its ministry, placing different gifts in different parts of the church. Paul lists some of those gifts in our text: ***“For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*** But Paul make it clear: ***All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”***

Now, here is the really wonderful thing: when all those gifts are brought together in the church, something is going to happen. It is the exact opposite of those destructive implosions that may fascinate us when we see them on television. It isn't going to be an implosion that destroys, but an explosion that builds up. God starts with a pile of rubble—with worthless, rotten sinners like you and me. But He takes that rubble and makes it something beautiful and new. Jesus Christ takes all our rottenness of sin upon Himself. He demolishes our sin as He dies in our place on the cross. In His resurrection, He raises us up into what Paul refers to as ***“a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*** (Ephesians 2:22, ESV)

That Spirit, who is given to us in our Baptism, works in us through God's Word and Sacraments to bless us with faith, so that through Him alone we confess: ***“Jesus is Lord.”*** And He empowers us with His gifts. Like those demolition experts, the Spirit carefully places His powerful gifts as charges in the hearts and lives of people. Like a master coach, He puts His people in the positions that make His Church a powerhouse. And when He unleashes that power, great things happen. Just look at that reality in our own church family, with the many things that happen to build up the body of Christ in this place. We have those who serve as Elders or on the Parish Planning Council. We have those who serve through the LWML. We have our Sunday School staff and our youth counsellors. We have our singers, our ushers, our hosts at coffee hour and more. We have people who pray, who encourage, who work quietly in ways that many may not see. But in all these things, we see people using the great variety of gifts that the Spirit has given to His glory. God has blessed us with many wonderful, hardworking, faithful people. I thank God for each of you and for the service that you provide in His name. I thank God for the blessings that come to us as we work and serve together in His name. And I thank God that He has called us to use His gifts together for His glory.

Our church and its ministry are blessed by God. He has provided us with all we need. He has equipped us for service in His kingdom. We know that, by the mercy and grace of God, each and every one of us has a gift, given as the Spirit has determined. We also know that there is untapped power; that there are unused gifts within our church family. Sometimes we aren't always team players; we miss our assignments, and it gives the opposition—the devil—the advantage. But thankfully we go on in the forgiveness and strength of God. Only God knows how many of His gifts are still waiting to be put to use among us, but we know we do have the Spirit's power. He continues to bless us in that power for our mutual good. All it takes is for that power to be unleashed, as God's people use their gifts to serve Him. Can you imagine what would happen among us if we all used our talents, our gifts and our abilities to His glory? Maybe we should post a sign out front: ***“Caution! Holy Spirit at work”***, because when those gifts are used as God has blessed, there is going to be an explosion. We are going to burst out of beyond the walls of this church, touching others in our world with the hope and life we have in Christ. We are going to see great, wonderful and glorious things happen in the name of the Lord, by the power He gives for His glory. And we will see blessings that touch the hearts of many, as the Spirit works in us and through us. Amen.