

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Today we have readings from Isaiah, 1 Corinthians and Luke that substantiate the fact that the Holy Spirit is in charge! In the reading from Isaiah 62 we heard this morning, God gives the people of Judah a new name, gives them, and us, a new task to be a “crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord” (Isaiah 62:1-5). It is all God’s good gifts to them. The gospel lesson is all about what God makes happen, the miracle Jesus did at the wedding in Cana (John 3:1-11). Even the faith of the disciples, insofar as it was inspired by this miracle, must be considered a gift from God, since the miracle was God’s doing. In our second lesson, the one I’m speaking to today, from 1 Corinthians 12, we hear that all the gifts and talents we have are all gifts of God. Specifically, they are gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, over half of the Americans who identified as Christians in a 2021 survey do not believe in the Holy Spirit (Mettler, Z., *Most U.S. ‘Christians’ Don’t Believe the Holy Spirit is Real, Study Finds*. Sept 13, 2021. Culture. As retrieved 01/18/25 from <https://dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com>). As Lutherans we believe in the work of the Holy Spirit. Martin “Luther explained that God teaches us through the external word of the Scriptures. The word, and the material signs of baptism and the Lord’s Supper that accompany the word, serves as the ‘bridge, the path, the way, the ladder’ between a person and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Spirit comes to the person by this path, rather than the person having to come to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, said Luther, ‘is not acquired through breaking images or any other works, but only through the gospel and faith.’ That is, the Spirit comes to us through the word (*sola scriptura*) and faith (*sola fide*), not because of our works but by grace (*sola gratia*) (Luther’s 1524-25 treatise, *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and the Sacraments*).

So how do we, as Christ-followers, acknowledge the importance of the Holy Spirit? First by admitting that it is not we who come to faith. It is essential for our salvation that we give the glory to God by admitting that faith is not something we do, but what God does for us through grace. As Luther once said, “We prefer to say what happens is our own doing” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 14, p. 116). But when we say it is our doing that has brought us to faith, we are negating the words of Paul as he wrote in v. 3 of today’s reading from 1 Corinthians. Paul tells us that only by the Spirit can we proclaim Jesus is Lord! Faith is only possible through the Holy Spirit. Faith is a gift of God.

Paul goes on to list the gifts of the Spirit, saying they are activated by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:10 claims that we are created for good works, not that we will be saved by our good works, we are created to do good works that glorify God, that work for the good of the community, that do not bring dissension upon the body of Christ. As long as you always keep in mind that faith is God’s work, that the Spirit is responsible for our belief, then you will not have the worry that you are cheating God of the glory of saving us. If we take that to heart, that faith and all the good works we do are God’s gifts, then the Holy Spirit does not become an issue. We begin to see the Holy Spirit everywhere, in all the good we do, and we do that good not to bring attention and glory to ourselves, but to bring glory to God.

Luther tells us “that without the Holy Spirit our hearts are either hardened in sins or they despair...” (*What Luther Says*, p. 662). The Holy Spirit makes us willing and ready to live for God and steers us through rough waters like a ship captain through a storm. The Holy Spirit, one of the persons of the Triune God, who since Pentecost lives among us, is present with us. When we acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit, we have nothing to worry about. Our faith is strong enough because it is in God’s realm of control

being carried out by the Holy Spirit. Faith is God's matter. In today's gospel reading what Jesus did, turning the water into wine, created faith in his disciples. Look around you and see the good that has been done because of faith that comes through the grace of God.

Paul speaks about things like love, beauty, and truth that only happen because the Spirit is present. And these things happen when the spiritual gifts we are given are used for the good of the community. As this passage was discussed in our pastor's pericope Bible study Tuesday, it was noted that every person is given all the gifts, it is just that some are better developed in some people. And that the use of gifts is fluid, one gift may be predominant at one point in time and another gift may become predominant at another point in time. Since we are all given the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it is our responsibility as Christ followers to use these gifts, and not to allow them to become stagnant. And since each person is given the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we are not to take all tasks upon ourselves, but we are to encourage and allow others to develop their Spirit given gifts for the common good. We need to appreciate the diversity, the differences, and the strength that we gain through sharing with one another.

Jenny Lind, an outstanding Swedish opera soprano who found popularity in the US by performing concerts for P.T. Barnum, always spent a few minutes alone in her dressing room before a concert. Her maid, who locked the door and stood guard over it, explained what happened in those last moments of preparation. Miss Lind would stand in the middle of the floor, her shoulders back and her head up, draw a deep breath, strike a clear, vibrant note, and hold it for as long as her breath lasted. When the overtones had all died away, she would look up and say: "Master, let me ring true tonight!" Jenny Lind's prayer ought to be ours as "stewards of our gifts and abilities." "Let me ring true." As we identify and use the gifts given to us by God, we develop our discipleship and our stewardship. Jenny Lind identified her gift as the ability to sing, and her prayer always was that she would glorify God whenever she used that musical gift. We are stewards of our gifts just like Jenny Lind, and we live out our spiritual gifts for the purpose of giving glory to God and building God's domain.

Every steward has a calling to be a minister out in the world during the week. While it's important that we offer our gifts and abilities here to God's glory in the church, it is much more crucial to discover what God has given us and how we might use that gift and skill out in the world. For teachers, health professionals, social workers, and evangelists, it's obvious. They are the so-called helping professions. But to be caretakers of all God's creation, including God's people, means that we do what God has enabled us to do, and we do it as worship to him by offering ourselves in ministry to all God's people - our neighbors.

We have a ministry to fulfill out in the world where we live, play, work, and witness. Each must identify the gift that God has put forward for a season of time and offer it up to the mutual well-being and upbuilding of other brothers and sisters. Stewardship is a big responsibility. God created humans and "put us in charge." We are also in charge of ourselves, and the gifts God has given to each one of us. To use our gifts out in the world where our ministry happens is crucial. We have gifts from God which are to be shared and not hoarded. Together we are Christ's body alive here and we must use our talents to upbuild and support that body. Faithfully sharing our gifts of the Holy Spirit is one of the ways we demonstrate that led by the Holy Spirit we are God's people on earth.

All glory be to God!