

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Service Theme: *Pentecost--God Pours Out His Spirit*
Sermon Theme: *Unity, Diversity, Unity* (May 28, 2023)
1 Corinthians 12:3-11

A wise man once said, ***“Clark, that’s the gift that keeps on giving.”*** Ok, he wasn’t that wise, because that was Cousin Eddie from the movie Christmas Vacation. But his sentiment is applicable today, because on Pentecost Sunday, we’re celebrating the gift that truly does keep on giving. Not a subscription to the Jelly of the Month Club, but the Holy Spirit!

50 days after Jesus’ resurrection, on Pentecost, God poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit on his people. The sound of a violent wind and tongues of fire on his followers’ heads announced that the gift had been delivered. And when God poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit on them, that gift gave them another gift! ***“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*** And through that gift, God gave a gift to the bewildered “all nations” crowd, who exclaimed, ***“We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”*** And if that weren’t enough, by God’s grace and the Spirit’s power working through Peter’s Law-Gospel sermon, three thousand people were given the greatest gift of the Spirit-- saving faith in Jesus as their Savior.

Talk about the gift that keeps on giving! But the pertinent question for us is for how long does that gift keep on giving? 2,000 years after that first Pentecost, God is still giving gifts to his people through the Holy Spirit! This morning, Paul teaches us that the Holy Spirit keeps on giving us the gifts of **Unity, Diversity, and Unity.**

First, unity. Paul tells the Corinthians, ***“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.”*** Certainly, Paul doesn’t mean no one can simply say the phrase “Jesus is Lord” without the Spirit’s

power. Even the most hardened unbeliever could speak the words. What Paul means is that no one can speak those words as the overflow of the faith in their heart—AKA, no one can actually believe that Jesus is Lord—except by the Holy Spirit’s power!

In his letter to the Ephesian Christians, Paul writes, ***“You were dead in your transgressions and sins.”*** Because of the sinful nature we inherit from our parents—and ultimately from our first parents, Adam and Eve—we’re born spiritually dead. One of my professors at the Seminary often recounted how he worked at a morgue during college. And he’d always say, that when he had to move a corpse, he couldn’t just say, “Excuse me, Mr. Smith, can you please move over onto that table over there, you’re kinda heavy.” Dead people can’t move themselves. Because they’re dead! Likewise, since everyone is by nature spiritually dead, we can’t bring ourselves to faith or move ourselves to spiritual life. We can stay spiritually dead, but the only we can have spiritual life is if the Holy Spirit brings us to it by giving us the gift of faith in Jesus! Only through his power can we say, “Jesus is Lord,” and mean it!

That’s how the Spirit gives us the gift of unity. Because we’re all in the same boat. The only reason you have faith in Jesus as your Savior is because the Holy Spirit brought you to faith as you heard or studied God’s Word, or because the Spirit brought you to faith as he was poured out on you while water was poured out on you at your Baptism. All believers are united by the fact that the only reason we believe and are saved is because of the Spirit’s power, poured out on us as an undeserved gift of God’s grace!

It doesn’t matter if you were baptized as an infant and have been a believer your entire life, or if you came to faith 5 minutes ago—none of us can take credit for it. It’s all the gift that keeps on giving—the gift of the Holy Spirit! No matter how many differences we might have, we’re all united as one with each other through faith in Christ!

Paul continues that through the Holy Spirit, God also gives us the gift of diversity. Paul writes, ***“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 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.

While all believers are united by the gift of faith, the Spirit gives diverse gifts to his people! Not everyone has the same spiritual gifts, and that's good! In Paul's day, some Christians received the gift of wisdom and the practical application of it for leadership and counsel. Others received the gift of insight, and the ability to not just understand God's truths, but to illuminate it in a clear and convincing way. Others were given the gift to perform miraculous healings or other miracles that verified God's message and power. Others received the gift of prophecy, relaying direct revelation from God to his people. Some were given the gift to distinguish prophecies of God, from prophecies of false prophets. Some were gifted with the ability to speak in tongues—languages they didn't know, like on Pentecost. Others were given the gift of interpreting those tongues, so that those who heard them could benefit from them.

You can see how the Holy Spirit gifted his Church with diverse gifts which could be used collaboratively to carry out God's work. Later in 1 Corinthians, Paul pictures it like the different functions of the different parts of the body. What good would it be if every body part was an ear? Ears are important, but we need a diversity of body parts and functions to live! Likewise, we need a diversity of spiritual gifts and functions to carry out Gospel ministry!

Maybe you noticed, but besides practical wisdom and spiritual insight, God doesn't give most of the spiritual gifts Paul mentions anymore. We no longer spontaneously break out in foreign tongues like Pentecost, or spend our Sundays performing faith healings, or relaying special prophecies from God. Why the difference?

The difference is, the early church Paul wrote to hadn't received the full revelation of God's Word yet. So, God still gave special prophecies and revelations that people needed to know, and provided miraculous power to verify their message's truth. But today, we have

everything God wants us to know revealed in the Bible, and the truth of Scripture verifies itself! As Hebrews says, ***“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”***

But that doesn't mean the Spirit has stopped giving diverse and impactful spiritual gifts to his people! Some receive gifts for preaching; or teaching adults; or teaching children; or caring for children; or craftsmanship; or technology; or compassion; or counseling; or administration; or yardwork; or cooking; or cleaning. The list goes on—but each gift the Spirit gives are useful and important for Gospel ministry!

What's critical within that diversity is that we remember two important things. Paul says, ***“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”*** Notice to whom the Spirit distributes these spiritual gifts—to each one! Meaning, there's no one excluded. No one can claim, “The Spirit hasn't given me a gift!” That also means no one can claim, “The ministry of God's church isn't my responsibility!” Since God has given us all spiritual gifts, all Christians are called to participate in the ministry of the Gospel. It's just a matter of how and where we use those gifts!

Notice also that the all-knowing God has determined what spiritual gifts to give you. The Spirit has intentionally given you unique spiritual gifts, so that you can serve God in specific ways, in specific circumstances, and in specific places—which he knows in advance. And God “don't make no mistakes!” Meaning, no one is obsolete, unimportant, or not gifted to serve!

That also means we shouldn't look at the spiritual gifts of others and wish they were ours. Or look at others' spiritual gifts and think that theirs are so much more important than ours—or that ours are so much more important than theirs! God gives diverse gifts because he knows all the different things the church needs to do in order to accomplish God's purpose and plans! If each gift is given specifically by God as he knows best, then what room is there to boast or be prideful of our

gifts? What room is there to feel inadequate, unimportant, or ashamed of our gifts? Because they're gifts from God who knows what's best, not something we produce for ourselves!

But how easily we lose sight of that! How easily we assume that we're not important-- or that we're too important! Or that our gifts aren't useful or impactful for the Gospel; or that we don't need to use our gifts to serve God, because other people will pick up the slack; or forgetting who our gifts came from, and using them only for ourselves.

The diversity God gifts to his church is good! But it's only useful if we all use our diverse gifts for the same unified purpose. God gifts his church with diversity, so that, again, there can be unity!

Notice how Paul contrasts diversity and unity with these gifts. ***“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.*”**

There's a diversity of gifts, service, and work within the church. But the same Spirit distributes them to us all, the same Lord is served through them, and the same God works through all of our work! We're united through our faith in Christ, and through that faith we have diverse gifts, which we use for the united purpose of serving the God who has given us salvation as a free gift of his grace, through faith in Christ!

That means our diverse gifts have all-important purpose and meaning. As Paul writes, they're all given ***“for the common good.”*** Which

means when we use our gifts, our main question isn't, “How will this benefit me? How does this make me feel?” but rather, “How is God served through this? How will this benefit others spiritually?”

But amazingly, when we use the spiritual gifts God has given us to serve God and benefit others, he's also drawing us closer to him, shaping and molding us into more Christ-like people! I recently heard a pastor say, ***“We don't use people to get work done. We use work to get people done.”*** When you use your gifts to serve God and benefit others, God also uses them to benefit and grow you!

That's why Pentecost is a celebration of the gift that keeps on giving! God does this beautiful multiplication. He pours out the Holy Spirit on us, and unites us as one through faith in Christ. Then he gives believers spiritual gifts to serve him and benefit others spiritually. And from that ministry we do, the Spirit continues bringing others into our unity of faith. And he gives them gifts to use...and the cycle continues! Unity, diversity, unity. The gift just keeps on giving!

That's why I want to encourage you today, if you haven't done so before, to fill out one of these Spiritual Gifts Surveys. It's a list of the many ways you can use your God-given gifts to serve him and benefit others through our ministry here at Victory—through YOUR ministry here at Victory! You're not signing up to do these things, per se. Rather it's an opportunity to reflect on what gifts the Spirit has given you, and to prayerfully consider the ways you can best use them. It also helps us build a database of how people are gifted to serve. That way, when we need someone with those gifts, we'll know who to contact! People who know the gifts we've been given, and want to keep on giving.