

The Power of One 1 Corinthians 12: 3-13

The abundance of red here today reminds us that we are celebrating Pentecost. Red is a symbol of the power of the Holy Spirit, who first appeared as tongues of fire and rested upon those first 120 disciples gathered in Jerusalem. Acts 2:2-4 tells us how it happened.

Pentecost has its roots in a Jewish holiday known as Shavuot. The word Pentecost literally means fiftieth day and Shavuot takes place 50 days after the celebration of Passover. It commemorates the anniversary of the day God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses as the ancient Israelites gathered at Mt Sinai. That day, they became a nation committed to serving God. For us Christians, Pentecost marks the day the Holy Spirit descended and filled the disciples, exactly 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus. It was the day the Christian church was born.

So there are really two Pentecost's. One celebrated by Jews 50 days after the Passover and one celebrated by Christians 50 days after the Resurrection. One marks the birth of the Jewish nation and the other marks the birth of the Christian church. God's is the author of both. The Holy Spirit is perhaps the most mysterious person of the Trinity, whom we recognize as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just as we cannot understand how God always was, is and will be, it is a divine mystery how God is three and One. Even so, the Scriptures allow us to have an adequate yet limited understanding of who God is. The Father is the One who never changes- the One who always was, always is and always shall be, the creator and maker of all things, all powerful, all loving and all knowing. We believe Jesus Christ to be God's Son, God revealed to us in perfect human form, the Word, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, or as someone once said "love with skin on".

The Holy Spirit is a bit harder to grasp. Like the Father and Jesus, the Holy Spirit is not a thing but a divine being. The Bible describes the third person of the Trinity many ways. He is the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of the Living God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Fire, the Spirit of Judgment, the Spirit of Holiness, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Life, the Spirit of Grace, the Spirit of Glory.

In the Book of Hebrews, He is called the Oil of Joy. The Holy Spirit is known as a comforter, a counselor, an advocate, a paraclete and a helper. It is no wonder we can be confused. My hope is for us to have with a better understanding of who the Spirit is and why God has blessed us with His presence. Allow me to share something written by Robertson McQuilkin. Mr. McQuilkin was president of Columbia Bible College when his wife of 40 years became ill with cancer. He wrote a book called "A Promise Kept" about their struggle with the disease and his decision to step down as president and honor and keep his marriage vows by caring for her.

He wrote several other books, including one entitled "Living in the Spirit". This is what he had to say about the Holy Spirit. Imagine the President of the US has come to speak at your local high school graduation. The band strikes up "Hail to the Chief", the crowd rises to their feet and the president enters the room. With cameras flashing, the president strides to the microphone with a giant spotlight guiding his every step. Just before the president gets to the podium, the crowd turns their backs to the stage and instead applauds the person running the spotlight.

The point of his illustration is that the person running the spotlight is like the Holy Spirit. The primary role of the Spirit is to glorify, shine the spotlight- on the Son. Mr. McQuilkin believes that we make a mistake when we focus so much on the person and work of the Spirit that we lose sight of the central figure of time and eternity- the Lord Jesus Christ. His words are true. We can be so fixated on being filled with the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit and moved by the Spirit that it becomes more about us than it is about the chief reason the Spirit came to begin with- to illumine and glorify Christ.

The Apostle Paul sums that premise up in the latter part of verse 3- no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ so Jesus might be glorified. How does that happen? The Holy Spirit gives us the things we need to empower and move us to make the name of Jesus known to all. They are spiritual gifts, not natural skills, talents or abilities, and are meant to be used within our own Christian community. John Wesley would define community as congregation, society, or class meeting. They are for the church and for the benefit of those who do not yet know Christ.

Spiritual gifts strengthen the body of Christ and prepare us to go and be the body of Christ- united as one- for the world. They are listed in the passage that was read earlier. Notice that they all originate from the same source- the Triune God. These gifts come from God the Father, they are delivered by the Holy Spirit and are to be used to help us bring the light of Jesus, the love of Christ into the darkness and brokenness of the world in which we live.

They fall into two main categories- speaking and serving. Some of us have the gift of wisdom, the ability to discern God's will and apply that understanding to life. Wisdom implies experience, something that comes with age and practice. To find the wisest person in the room you probably would not look for the youngest.

Others have the gift of knowledge. Knowledge is a distant relation of wisdom. It is the ability to comprehend and convey Biblical truth. The biggest difference is someone with knowledge may not necessarily have the wisdom to apply that knowledge to life's situations.

Faith is another gift of the Spirit. This is a specific kind of faith, rather than the saving faith in Christ which all believers possess. Perhaps this is the faith that gives us the strength to do things we previously thought impossible.

Others have the gift of healing. This might be physical healing, or it could be those helping to mend broken relationships. Paul lists several other gifts together: the working of miracles, the gift of prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, discerning tongues. Because of their physical nature, many Bible scholars believe most of those gifts were meant for the early church to validate the Apostolic preachers of the gospel. Each one of these gifts, as diverse as they are, come from the same source. They are ours by the grace of God, the God of Three in One. They are all given for the same purpose- to bring us together as one so we can glorify Christ. There is power when we are one. May others see Christ in us...Amen