

FIRST LESSON: Numbers 11:24-30
SECOND LESSON: 1 Corinthians 12:3-13
May 31, 2020

PENTECOST SUNDAY

“The Work of the Spirit”

Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

The Holy Spirit is a part of God. Although it's hard to describe the Spirit as a person, the doctrine of the trinity does exactly that. Three persons—one God. Yes, it's a challenge. Personally, I don't think we have a clue when it comes to defining God. God is *way* beyond our comprehension. But one thing we do know—and that is that we cannot control the Spirit, although many have tried. In our Old Testament reading this morning when two men named Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the power of the Holy Spirit Joshua son of Nun tried to stop them, because he didn't think they were authorized to do so. Moses' response was enlightening. He said, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”

In the New Testament under the new covenant the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all believers. But not all receive the same gifts. If everyone had the gift of prophesy it would be noisy but not much would get done. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians there was division among them because they had created a hierarchy of gifts of the Spirit. The more supernatural the gifts appeared to be, the higher the status, and therefore the higher the status of the one exercising them. When the charismatic movement burst onto the scene in the 20th century something of the same nature happened. While it is absolutely fabulous that people once more discovered that God could work through them supernaturally, there was a tendency to elevate these gifts above the more mundane ones. Tongues versus helping people in need. Well tongues is just so much more exciting! But helping people in need, MUCH more necessary.

The word charismatic, which we also use to describe a person of unusual charm, has its roots in the word for grace. For the Greeks it would have reminded them of the practice of patronage. A patron was generous with his gifts, and in return won the loyalty and service of those in his debt. When we speak of charismatic gifts these are gifts given by God, our ultimate patron. We haven't earned them. The special abilities or vocations we have are the work of the Holy Spirit in us. And all gifts are given to accomplish God's work, not to make us look good in the eyes of others.

We have a tendency to want to order and define the world around us, to make it more comprehensible so we feel safe. We try to do the same thing with God. But God is surprisingly untidy. I know! Every time I go out and weed the garden I'm faced with creative chaos. Things grow all over the place. The nerve! And when it comes to the work of the Spirit, God just goes ahead and does

things without even consulting me. We don't even have a definitive list of God's gifts. While there are nine gifts listed here, Paul mentions more in Ephesians and Romans, some of which overlap, but many of which do not. Then in I Corinthians 13 while he doesn't use the word gift at all, Paul describes things labeled as gifts elsewhere like speaking in tongues or prophesying and goes on to say that without love, these gifts are nothing, because the greatest gift of all is love.

Whenever Paul speaks of the gifts of the Spirit the message is the same. They are parts of a whole, meant to work together. We are the body of Christ, with each individual having his or her own calling and giftedness. We fit together. We're a team. I haven't got clue one about football, but even I know that you can't have an entire team made up of quarterbacks. Each player has a different role. Each person, even if they play only a supportive role, is vital to the success of the game. And it is essential that all are involved. Neither Offense nor Defense can take the day off without it costing the team the game. Everyone needs to fulfill their role. If not, then while the team may still exist, it will not win many games.

It is not possible for a Christian to have no role to play in the body of Christ. It is not possible to have no gifts. Everyone who belongs to Christ has been given gifts by God. We might not know what our gifts are, but they still exist. Part of our calling is to discover what they are and then to use them. Some of the gifts Paul mentions we may not even think of as gifts at all, but they are essential. Wisdom, knowledge and faith are not flashy, but they are very important.

When it comes to the more "supernatural" gifts our ideas and reality don't always connect. We've been watching too much TV. While many of us picture the gift of healing as something only done by televangelists with loud voices, we have experienced miraculous healing in this congregation, and we did it very quietly. And while "prophecy" sounds like something out of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, biblical prophecy is not fore-telling, it is "forth-telling". Preaching can fall under that category. Cass's pastoral letters can fall under that category. Distinguishing between spirits is just another way of saying discernment. It's being able to spot evil for what it is. You may have discernment and not even know you have it, but you can spot a fraud a mile away. And while we may not have anyone here in this congregation currently speaking in tongues and interpreting them, that's probably less critical. Fine if you want to start next week, but so far I haven't seen anyone here recently with that gift. We used to have two. While the Corinthians were enamored with tongues, Paul was fairly neutral on the subject. What is really important for a congregation to be healthy is that diverse gifts and insights are used for the benefit of all.

Our divine vocation from God may or may not be reflected in what we do for a living. Most people are not actively employed in ministry. But it does impact how we do our jobs. And it's also an important concept for us to grasp if we are currently NOT working due to the pandemic. Many of us tie our self-worth to our ability to earn a living. But we are valuable before God and gifted by God whether we are currently earning a living or not. We will always have a job to do in the kingdom of heaven.

The Spirit does not go behind us. The Spirit goes ahead of us. So, *what is God up to now?* Clearly everything has been turned upside down, inside out and shaken. Where is God at work? How does God want us to serve? The Holy Spirit has given each of us gifts, and we may well have gifts we don't even know about. I invite you to take some quiet time apart this week to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you where the Spirit is working and where the Spirit is leading you, to ask what your gifts are. You may be surprised, and find new doors opening. Amen.

Numbers 11:24-30

24 So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. **25** Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again. **26** However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. **27** A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” **28** Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!” **29** But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” **30** Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

1 Corinthians 12:3-13

3 Therefore I want you to know that 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. **4** There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. **5** There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. **6** There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. **7** Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. **8** To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, **9** to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, **10** 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. **11** All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. **12** Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.