

January 20, 2013

Epiphany 2

"Gifted by the Holy Spirit to Give Glory to Jesus"

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. ² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ Therefore I tell you 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. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 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 the message of wisdom, to another the 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 gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Have you ever seen Canadian geese fly in a V formation? As a child I recall hearing the familiar honk of the Canadian geese as they flew over our farm on their way south for the winter. Always the geese would fly in a V-formation. Now we know why they do that. By flying in formation they ride on the lift that is created by the geese flying in the front allowing them to add 71% more to their distance. They take turns in the lead position and they honk to encourage each other to stay in formation. God designed the geese to support each other with these unique flying habits.

Before us this morning we have God's Word telling us how we support each other in the body of Christ. When we become believers the Holy Spirit provides us with spiritual gifts that are used to support and encourage each other in the body of Christ.

While Jesus was on this earth, he used miracles to draw attention to himself as the Son of God. It says of Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine, "He thus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him." Today Jesus brings glory to himself through the members of his church that he has scattered all over the world, and here in this congregation. This morning I ask you to think of how gifted you are by the Holy Spirit to bring glory to Jesus.

Gifted with faith that glories Jesus

Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth, "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." Instead of being like geese that fly in a V formation, these people lost sight of how their spiritual gifts were for supporting and helping each other. People were bragging and boasting about their spiritual gifts. Later in this chapter Paul would write: "But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts

that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but its parts should have equal concern for each other." Satan loves to divide Christian congregations into different factions. He loves to keep us in the dark on just how gifted we are by the Holy Spirit.

How blessed and gifted you are with the gift of faith. It is truly amazing how the Holy Spirit takes people who are born into this world worshipping false idols and brings them to saving faith in Christ. Paul wants the Christians in Corinth to recall how foolish they once were in the way they followed dumb idols. "You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols." When Paul first visited Corinth he saw a city that was rich and prosperous, but also extremely immoral and totally given to the worship of mute idols. Corinth was famous for its temples that combined prostitution with worship of false gods. Even among the pagan and immoral Greeks the word for gross immoral behavior was "to corinthianize."

Here is how Paul describes this amazing deliverance by the Holy Spirit in chapter 6. "Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor the drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." If only these people could always remember how the Holy Spirit had rescued them from gross idolatry and adultery, there would be no confusion and consternation and contention in the congregation.

See all the idols on the streets of Corinth. These idols are mute. They cannot speak. They cannot hear and answer your prayers. Remember our summer sermon series on Jeremiah. He called these mute idols scarecrows in a melon patch. "Like a scarecrow in a melon patch their idols cannot speak, they must be carried because they cannot walk." Idols are idle (IDLE). They are do nothing gods. My German ancestors once worshipped do nothing idle idols with names such as Thor and Woden and Tiws from which we get the names of our week. God the Holy Spirit led our ancestors to saving faith in Christ.

Instead of cursing the name of Jesus and hating him, the Holy Spirit has led you to call Jesus your Lord and God. "Therefore I tell you 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." You love the name of Jesus. You love your Lord and God who came to this earth to take your sin upon himself and make payment for the sin and then rise from the dead to assure you that you are forgiven. Whenever you hear someone use the name of Jesus is a bad way it hurts you deeply. When the Apostle Paul was converted by Jesus on the road to Damascus, he went from hating the name of Jesus to loving the name of Jesus. When you come to worship you love to sing hymns that use the name of Jesus. You love to stand and confess your faith with the words of the Apostle Creed or Nicene Creed.

In the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Hallowed by Thy Name" which means we want to hallow or glorify God's name in everything we do. We certainly don't want to curse the name of Jesus. We also don't want anything to give the name of Jesus a bad name. Satan loves to give Jesus a bad name by having Christians fail to rejoice every day in the miracle of faith given to them by the Holy Spirit and the miracle of spiritual gifts that are given to us also by the Holy Spirit. What an amazing group of people we have here in worship this morning. We share this common bond of believing and confessing "Jesus is Lord" by the

power of the Holy Spirit. We also share in the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit is producing among us.

Gifted with spiritual gifts that glorify Jesus

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” Notice the reference here to the true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Triune God that created the world, the Triune God who raised Jesus from the dead, the Triune God who leads you to faith in Jesus is also the same God who gives the spiritual gifts to you. Just as God creates the geese with the ability to fly in a V formation, your God gives you spiritual gifts when you are born again that can be used to support and help other members of the body of Christ. God is the same, but he gives different gifts to different people.

The Lord your God has given you spiritual gifts that you can use to serve other people and thereby bring glory to Jesus. Verse 7 says, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” When the wise men came to visit Jesus, they opened up their treasures and presented their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to bring glory to Jesus. There are different gifts, but they have the common good of supporting each other in the body of Christ and bring glory to Jesus. These gifts are not to be hidden and concealed. These gifts are not to be used to exalt ourselves. These gifts are not to be used to lord it over other people and make them feel inferior. That’s exactly what was happening in the congregation in Corinth, especially with the gift of speaking in tongues. In a choir, there are basses and tenors and sopranos and altos. It is the job of the choir director to get people to sing in such a way that they support each other. That is also true of an orchestra or band. The tuba player does not try to play as loud as possible to get lots of attention. That would ruin the band. Soccer is a team sport. The person who passes the ball and provides an assist is just as important as the person who kicks the goal.

These spiritual gifts given to believers are beautiful to behold when they are used in the right way. Paul speaks about the message of knowledge and wisdom. There are some people who are very gifted at digging into God’s Word and then sharing these truths others. Some people are gifted with faith, not just saving faith in Christ, but this firm conviction in God’s promises. They are not afraid to build up other believers as they remind them of God’s promises that never fail. Romans 12 speaks of other spiritual gifts such as the gift of encouraging others. I think of all the times I have been encouraged by people who are blessed with this gift of encouragement.

Then there are the spectacular gifts that the early Christians were given to draw attention to Jesus. These are called sign gifts. Certain people received miraculous powers, and the ability to heal, and even speaking in tongues or different languages. Think of how speaking in tongues on Pentecost drew a large crowd of people that allowed Peter to speak about Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. Today we have something even more spectacular to draw the attention of people to Jesus. We have the Word of God given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We have Bibles printed and distributed at low cost. We can listen to the Bible read to us on MP3 players. You can type in a Bible verse in your computer or smart phone and receive instant access to that verse.

When I was a child and watched the geese fly in formation I recall wondering why they always flew in a V formation. Now I know. I also need God's Word to remind me this morning that the Holy Christian Church is made up of members who are given spiritual gifts to support and help each other. As Paul reminds us, "All these are the work of the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." Look around you and see these very special people who are gifted by the Holy Spirit to help and support you. The Holy Spirit is using their gifts to bring glory to Jesus and to support you. The Holy Spirit is using your gifts to help them and bring glory to Jesus. Amen.