

We read this familiar Pentecost story a couple Sundays after Easter. We read it to kick off our exploration of the early church and the work of Holy Spirit. Today is the actual Feast of Pentecost.

We've been using the book of Acts as our primary source for exploring the work of the Holy Spirit. Today we added in a section of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In it, Paul sums up the work of the Spirit in the disciples as the ability to proclaim that Jesus is Lord and work for the common good.

Today we're focusing on the gifts, or abilities, the Spirit gives to the church – to Jesus' followers. Those gifts enable the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us.

So your handy take home list for today is a list of the spiritual gifts laid out in Paul's writing in Corinthians and in his letter to the Romans. As time has gone on, the church has recognized others so I've added to the list a little.

The first great display of these spiritual gifts happened in the event described in Acts 2. It's often called speaking in tongues.

There are two kinds of speaking in tongues. The first is what is described here. It's the ability to speak a real foreign language that you've never learned. It enables the proclamation of the gospel to all people.

The other kind of speaking in tongues is probably what most of the later descriptions in the New Testament were – a Spirit language not known to anyone. And it's what virtually all of modern day speaking in tongues is. Someone is moved during a time of prayer to speak this Spirit language. It's not a language anyone would recognize or be able to translate.

While speaking in tongues is still experienced in the Pentecostal and other charismatic churches, we Lutherans seem to have been largely bypassed by that one.

A little later on in our series, we'll touch on some of the different spiritual movements, from the early church to modern times. We'll talk a bit more about the Pentecostal church then.

In recent years, there have been a variety of spiritual gift inventories available for people to take to discern what their particular gifts are. You can find them online. Besides the things listed from scripture, there are usually some things not listed in scripture – the arts, music, financial management, and so on.

Assessment of gifts and talents is obviously not confined to religious circles. And certainly, people outside the church have gifts and talents that can be used for the common good.

What sets apart the gifts of the spirit in the church are the ways they enable us to say that Jesus is Lord. Does a particular gift you might have enable you to point to Jesus and his victory over evil? Does it enable you to do the work to which Jesus calls you?

At the heart of the conversation about spiritual gifts is our identity. We are all born with our own unique and beautiful identity.

We receive our Christian identity in baptism. Our calling in the world stems from our baptism. That calling - our vocation - parallels the work of the Holy Spirit, which we also receive at baptism.

Our baptismal vocation is to proclaim Christ crucified and risen to save the world and to work for the common good.

But we do not all receive the same gifts to do that work. A big part of growing and maturing in faith and life is discovering who we are and what our own gifts are.

Another part of growing and maturing in faith is recognizing the gifts of others and being able to work together for the common good. We are all a part of one body and nobody's gift is less important than another's. The gifts of preaching and teaching are not higher callings than the gifts of being able to fix the broken things, bake the treats, and work on the landscaping.

The statement that Paul makes here about the body is revolutionary. That first century world was a hierarchy. The Corinthians were fiercely competitive and struggled with the humility the Christian life called for.

In fact, the whole Greco-Roman world was a hierarchy. This idea that nobody in the body was better than anyone else turned their world upside down. Slaves not lower than their masters? Wealthy business people not superior to peasants? How could that even be?

Sadly, the Church lost that sense of equality as it became a more organized structure. It too became a hierarchy. There has been work over the centuries to correct that, but it's hard to stamp out.

A hallmark of human sin is to rank and measure people against each other. So much time and energy is spent trying to be who we are not...to make an impression...to get ahead...to prove ourselves.

But what the world so desperately needs instead is people who will just be who they are and use their own unique gifts for the good of God's world.

As I was working on this message, I ran across several quotes that fit this day when we are celebrating Pentecost and Evie's Affirmation of Baptism.

Affirmation of Baptism is a big step in the church. It's when we lay claim to the promises our parents made at baptism and make them our own.

Then we take those promises into our participation in the church and into the world God created and loves.

My favorite quote was from St. Catherine of Siena. St. Catherine of Siena was an Italian mystic who was part of a Dominican order in the 14th Century. Here's her quote: Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.

It honestly sounds very 21st Century. I wouldn't be surprised if you could find it on a religious graduation card.

Those early disciples received the Spirit in wind and fire...and they did set the world on fire. It's not an overstatement to say the early church changed the course of human history. Not all for the better, but we can learn from the mistakes of the past even as we celebrate the good accomplishments of the church.

What does it mean to set the world on fire in our time?

We ended our confirmation year talking about the Holy Spirit and I led the kids through a little spiritual exercise. I first had them write down something – some issue or problem or something in their world that didn't seem right. Something they really cared about.

Then I had them spend a little time with this list of gifts and pick out something they think is one of their gifts. Then I had them write down how that gift might be used to help in the situations they care about.

You can do the same thing. Most likely you can identify at least one or two you think might be your gifts. Or maybe you have one not on the list. How can you use your gifts in a situation or issue you care about?

Evie used her gift of artistic ability to make our bulletin art. Art isn't on the lists Paul made, but over the centuries, art has been used in ways that draw us into the life of Christ and into the world of the Spirit. Spend some time with this piece later. What draws you in? What do you see? What is her work saying about God?

The world desperately needs people who can use their gifts for the common good...people who will recognize the gifts in others and work together. The world needs people who can use

their gifts to point to a Christ crucified and risen...and who calls us to take up a cross instead of a bludgeon.

And just like at that first Christian Pentecost, God continues to give us the gift and power of the Holy Spirit to do that work.

How does the Holy Spirit work?

Gifts of the Spirit

1Corinthians 12:3-11; 27-28

- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Faith
- Healing
- Powerful deeds (miracles)
- Prophecy – being able to see where things are wrong and speaking out
- Discernment of Spirits – the ability to tell when something is being directed by evil rather than by God
- Speaking in tongues
- Interpreting tongues
- Apostles (those sent out to proclaim the Gospel)
- Teaching
- Forms of assistance - helper
- Forms of leadership



Romans 12:3-8

- Prophecy
- Ministry
- Teaching
- Encouraging
- Giving
- Compassion

Others not listed in scripture

- Arts and music
- Financial management
- Other?