

“Using Your Gifts”

1 Corinthians 14:1-19

June 24, 2007

We wrap up our series on the Holy Spirit this morning. Over the last several weeks, we have focused our attention on this extended discourse by Paul to the house churches in Corinth about the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

This week, Paul looks at the work of the Holy Spirit in moving the body towards fulfilling its purpose: worship. Worship is the activity of the body. Worship is the exercise of the body. It is the action of the body. It is the expression of praise by the believers – together.

Hear 1 Corinthians 14:1-19.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to draw people together to worship God and building up the church.

Paul resumes his discussion of the body, left off at the end of Chapter 12 in order to talk about the importance of love. Paul’s emphasis here is the life of the body of believers together. He has been pushing togetherness since the beginning of the letter, and here he focuses his attention on the purpose of their togetherness: to worship God.

For what it is worth, Paul is not disparaging the gift of tongues; not at all. He is addressing a mis-understanding of the significance of tongues *in worship* in Corinth. Their misunderstanding has led to divisions and problems. His observations and corrections are self-evident – speaking in tongues edifies only the one speaking – unless there is an interpreter. In private devotions or in other prayer settings, tongues are a wonderful gift to lift up praise to God. It is a great blessing to be filled with the Holy Spirit and blessing God in our spirit.

But here, Paul is addressing the issue of how they conduct themselves when the body is gathered together. Paul emphasizes the importance of gathering together, worshipping together, working together to praise God, building up the church, and evangelizing non-believers.

Building up believers and evangelizing non-believers – even as *our attention* is focused on what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, *God is* using worship to build up the church and reach out to those who are lost.

Some spiritual gifts are specifically given for the worship context. Though he does not mention it here – he has addressed this previously – preaching, teaching, music and prayers are all appropriate for the gathered body. In his travels Paul would first go to the synagogues to preach and teach regarding Christ. He encourages the singing of spiritual songs. These things build up the church and they bear witness to non-believers.

Prophecy is appropriate in worship. Prophecy involves speaking “under the influence of divine inspiration, with or without reference to future events.” (BAGD) It has to do with seeing: seeing things as God sees them. The negative example of this given in the Greek lexicon is where Jesus was blindfolded and beaten and was being taunted, “Prophesy, who has struck you?” (Luke 22:64).

Within worship, prophecy provides clarity, correction, or exhortation *for the whole body*. “Thus sayeth the Lord,” is how the Biblical prophets used to begin their addresses to God’s people.

In Presbyterian congregations, we do not hear much about prophetic words in worship. Nor do we go out of our way to encourage it; in fact, we work very hard to make sure our worship is “decent and in order.” It is an old axiom: nothing is so upsetting to a preacher as a prophet in the pews – it means you never know when your sermon is going to be cut short.

Yet to rigidly exclude the possibility of the prophetic in worship deprives the church of the opportunity to experience the immediacy and imminence of God. A prophetic word is the wake up call to areas where we have either deliberately or ignorantly strayed away from God’s will. Remember, we are like sheep; prone to wander. Prophecy is like God’s shepherd’s crook: the call to accountability, the rebuke that restores the proper vision and the hope of God’s promises, and the reminder of our role in the covenant relationship with God.

Even knowing that prophesy is a gift of the Holy Spirit – or perhaps because of the accountability it entails – we treat prophecy like a visit from an unpredictable relative; we are kind of embarrassed, hope that we will not have to deal with it, or put it off as long as we can.

We do not miss the prophetic because we have become accustomed to not allowing for it. It becomes a self-fulfilling ...prophesy, because we do not expect God to show up in the midst of worship to say a word to us all, we stop listening. But here’s the catch: God does show up. Friends, we need to realize that the God we worship is here: receiving our worship; listening, moving in hearts, calling people to repentance, calling people to action, calling people to reach out in compassion, calling one and calling all.

In the midst of our worshiping God, God blesses us. God blesses each one individually, but God blesses the congregation collectively. The movement of the Holy Spirit builds up the whole body. We are strengthened as we sing together. We are built up as we pray together. We are moved to action when we hear the word of God proclaimed together.

Clarity is important in worship.

Now, having just encouraged all of you prophets in the pews to speak up, we need to read a little further in order to understand a few things. First of all, decency and order are actually good things in worship.

The entire distinction between tongues and prophesy is related to this point: uninterpreted tongues build up only the individual believer, prophesy and interpreted tongues build up the whole church. They are better in worship, Paul explains, because others can understand what is being said and can voice their participation in it.

It is no different in worship today. When the choir sings an anthem that connects, or if we have special music, or if a prayer or a moment in the sermon speaks to you, “amen” is an appropriate response. “Amen” says, “me, too. That spoke to me, that spoke for me.” That’s good. You are saying that you individually – and the church collectively – have been built up. You are joining in the body’s clear expression of praise for God.

Clarity is a blessing. Look at the gift God gave Solomon: God instructed Solomon to ask for a gift. Solomon asks for wisdom to discern between good and evil, reasoning, “who can govern this great people?” God is greatly pleased because Solomon asked for something to build up God’s people. “No one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you,” God promises Solomon. So it is: we still marvel as “wisdom like Solomon’s.” Solomon’s gift is later revealed in tremendous clarity, when two women are claiming to be the mother of one baby. His response makes clear who is true and who is not. And all were awed by the clarity of his wisdom.

Paul uses musical instruments as an illustration of the importance of clarity. Music that has no direction or purpose is noise. A trumpet that sounds an uncertain note is not going to be an encouragement to engage the battle. There is a purpose to all movement in worship.

If the body of Christ is a piano player, there are times when the Spirit moves us together to play basic scales. Those basic scales are acts of discipline – understanding that Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again for me (and for each one of us) is the foundation for everything we do. As we grow up together, we begin to play simple tunes – we learn how to pray and to read Scripture and act like disciples of Jesus. Then, we get stronger. Harmony with others becomes a part of our experience. We start sharing the gospel with others, we start inviting people to enjoy the fellowship we have found. We begin writing new music – it is not a new message and it does not abandon the foundation of discipline that began it – but there is a song unique to us that we have to share.

If you think about Chula Vista Presbyterian in those terms, there is reason to be encouraged. We are writing our new song. Our worship services are designed to lift high the name of Jesus and to build up the church. You should know that we are fielding calls from around the presbytery and around the country asking, “What is going on there?”

In short, we are experiencing the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst. We have seen the gifts of the people raised to the surface, exercised, and exciting things are happening. Many of you have been very kind in praising me for what is going on – but the reality is how I have responded: I have been discerning enough to get out of the way of what God is doing. This is not to say I have been absent; rather, it is to say that my role is to support, encourage, exhort, challenge, and occasionally prod you to see what God is doing – and what God is doing is building up the church.

There is an old story – and I may have already told this – about a community in the midst of a drought. Fire danger was great, the crops were in jeopardy. The new, young Presbyterian minister was approached to see if it would be all right if the Presbyterian Women gathered to pray in the sanctuary. He agreed. Being new, he thought he would go in and see how these long-time saints of the faith would approach things. At the appointed time, about ten women had gathered. The young pastor sat in the choir loft watching. They all seemed to be looking at their watches, then at each other. Finally, one said, “Well, I don’t know why Peggy is late, but we should probably get started.”

The pastor could not hear what they were praying. After a few minutes, he heard the sanctuary door open, quiet footsteps, and a small, frail lady made her way up the center aisle. He thought she was using a cane, but as she came closer he could see it was actually an umbrella.

The other ladies looked up, smiled when they saw the umbrella, welcomed her and continued on. After about an hour, they said the Lord’s prayer together and the meeting broke up.

You can almost guess what happened next. Within forty-eight hours, clouds began to build on the horizon and soon enough the first spatters of rain were heard on the pavement. The young pastor was at the grocery store as the drops began to fall. He saw Peggy, the woman with the umbrella, as she was about to enter the store. He hustled over to see her. “Wow!” he said, greeting her. “Peggy, this is just tremendous. You and the ladies – praying for rain and look at how it is raining.”

Suddenly, he sees stars. She smacked him over the head with the umbrella. “Young man,” she said, “Baptists pray for rain. Presbyterians pray that the glory of God would be revealed; this time, it just happened to be with rain.”

Clarity is important. “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

Look at the number of baptisms that have taken place this past year. Look at the number of people who have been coming through the doors for worship, for events, for fellowship, for the preschool, for the youth, for the kids, for the choir. It is a tremendous blessing to have people come into my office with ideas of how things they want to do – and to know that God is calling them to exercise their gifts for his glory and to build up the church.

What is not good is the situation where new people come in and experience confusion and discord. It is like a toddler banging on the keys of the piano. If the message is garbled, believers will be frustrated and non-believers will not be interested.

The message here – God’s righteousness reckoned to us by grace through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – is that simple and that mysterious. Our purpose, vision, and goal is to pursue the exploration of that truth, building up the church so that we can share our joy by bearing witness and ministering wherever God has called us to serve.

Where have we come?

This morning, we conclude our sermon series on the Holy Spirit. It is certainly not the last time we will speak of the Holy Spirit; nor, we pray, will it be the last time we experience the joy of worship and fellowship in the Holy Spirit.

But we return back to where we started with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. The Spirit of God is not someone we control; the Spirit of God is one for whom we wait. We follow. We respond; we do not lead. When the Spirit comes and fills us, we know that the wondrous works of God will be proclaimed and that God’s people will be awed.

We also will be awed by what the Spirit does among us: each one allotted a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Some have very public gifts, some have gifts that are exercised in private. Yet each one – you, me, all of us – belongs to each other; we need each other, we are dependent upon each other, and we are called to give our gifts for the benefit of one another.

When we are disciples of Jesus and live in the power of the Holy Spirit, we know several things for sure:

- We act in love. Our eyes are on Jesus, on the cross, on the hope of the grace that we have received – thus, we are not competing in faith but are gratefully bearing witness to what God has done;
- We worship God. The work of the Holy Spirit always manifests glory for God the Father; in word, in deeds of compassion, in expressions of the gifts for the common good.
- We see the church built up. Generally, it looks different than if we were in control (and thank God we are not). Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God draws people to worship. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God convicts hearts and brings them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Our job is not to build the church; our job is to be faithful and obedient to all Jesus has commanded. When Peter makes his confession in response to Jesus’ question, “Who do you say I am,” Jesus says, “On this rock *I* will build my church.”

Do we have eyes to see what Jesus is doing in our midst through the power of the Holy Spirit whom he sent?

Conclusion

So, when you go forward from here, bear witness to what you have seen God do in your presence:

- How you have been called to be a part of the body of Christ;
- How you have been called to give your gifts for the common good; and,
- How God has used us to transform lives for his glory.

That, friends, is seeing; that is prophecy, and that's the work of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

8:45 Prayer and offering

10:00 offering