

“One Spirit Many Gifts”  
A Sermon Delivered  
at  
Plymouth Congregational Church  
on  
Mother’s Day, Pentecost, May 11, 2008  
by  
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1 Corinthians 12: 4 – 13

It’s Mother’s Day and it is also Pentecost. Most of us have some idea what Mother’s Day is all about, but probably a smaller number have any idea what Pentecost is.

You will recall that since Easter we have been talking each week about how Jesus taught the disciples during the days following his death and preceding his ascension. Last week we talked about what he said to the disciples during their final face-to-face physical conversation. What he said was that he would not leave them without support and comfort and power. All of that would arrive with the Holy Spirit.

Today is the day of that Spirit’s traditional arrival. Pentecost is the day when we celebrate the pouring of the Holy Spirit into God’s creation. It is the birthday of the church.

Perhaps that’s the easiest way to remember what Pentecost is. It’s the birthday of the church. That’s why, 35 years ago this Pentecost, I choose to be ordained. The birthday of the church and the birthday of my ordained ministry is one and the same day.

Why does this matter?

It matters because we need to recognize what God has done and is continuing to do in our world and in our lives.

Today’s text says it clearly.

**To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Vs. 7**

Put differently, the Holy Spirit is God’s gift to all creation. The ways in which that spirit manifests itself are different for each person.

Note, this is not a matter of some being blessed and others not. No the text is very clear. Everyone receives the gift.

We can use the gift we are given or not, but we cannot deny that we have received it. It's ours to utilize for the common good.

On this Pentecost, on this day as we celebrate the truth that whether we be Jew or Greek, slave or free, we are all made to drink of one Spirit. On this day let's acknowledge once and for all that we are gifted by God, every one of us, young and old, rich and poor, male and female.

So what are we doing with our gifts?

That's not an easy question.

Let me make it a little easier. How is someone else you know using the gifts God has given him or her for the common good?

How about Alex Smith?

Open your bulletin and take a look at the list of those who have contributed to the "Music of Our Faith Campaign." There you see it, Alex Smith. Alex took a portion of the resource God had given him and he invested it in our church. Alex, together we say thank you.

Or Bill Gerlach; we recognized Bill as a teacher a few minutes ago but in truth Bill is a gifted teacher. He probably wouldn't have said that about himself but I assure you that anyone who has ever been Bill's student would so witness in a heartbeat.

Or Diane Marxen; not only does she sing in our choir but she is also a fine French horn player. The gift that she shares for the common good is the gift of music; music that carries our faith, our hopes, our adoration and, at times our despair; music that regularly eclipses the power of words to express the soul.

It is a skill that must be practiced and polished but at the core it is first a gift, a gift that God has given to individuals so that both singly and in choirs it may be shared for the common good.

Have you looked at this door of ours?

There is not another one even remotely like it anywhere in the world. Arvin Maggard designed it and built it so that we might have a way to make the entrance of our church a bit more appealing. It was built for the good of all and it was built with the gifts that God gave a good man.

Now look around. Do you see, here and there, a few mothers in our pews this morning?

Is there any greater gift in all humanity than the love God pours through a mother? The love that is beyond rationality and the love that absolutely defies description.

My point is simple. The Holy Spirit is God's great gift to creation. We all receive it in different ways but we all do receive.

So I ask again, what are our gifts?

I find the people I just introduced so humbling that the question is now even harder.

That's why today is not just the day of the Holy Spirit; it's also the birthday of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Not one of the people I just introduced would have described themselves in the way in which I described them. Not one!

But in the Church Jesus Christ called into being they don't have to. We gather in large measure in order to call out and encourage the gifts in one another.

I suspect that there is not a person here who cannot clearly see the gifts that God has placed in the life of another.

Today, this day, no more delays. Look around and let's call out the gifts that are all around us. Thank God for them and encourage the gifts that are so obvious to us and so often so invisible to the persons carrying them.

And, my friends, let us never ever forget that the gift of love is the greatest gift of all.

My mother has been gone for a long time now but I get to witness the gift of a mother's love pretty often.

I get to watch Judy's mother as she looks at the rather remarkable daughter she so totally loves. If that is not God's love turned loose in creation, then I really do know nothing at all!

God's greatest gift to any of us is surely the gift of love. Let us call it out wherever we see it.

Let us fan its flames and in the name of Jesus Christ let us encourage its generosity and its forgiveness.

The first Pentecost changed the world and we can do it again—today.

Amen.