

Sermon Week 1 of the Finance Campaign November 5, 2017

From the Apostle Paul's letter to the young church at Corinth: "What I want to talk about now is the various ways God's Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable. Remember how you were when you didn't know God, led from one phony god to another, never knowing what you were doing, just doing it because everybody else did it? It's different in this life. God wants us to use our intelligence, to seek to understand as well as we can. For instance, by using your heads, you know perfectly well that the Spirit of God would never prompt anyone to say, 'Jesus be damned!' Nor would anyone be inclined to say, 'Jesus is Master!' without the insight of the Holy Spirit.

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:

wise counsel

clear understanding

simple trust

healing the sick

miraculous acts

proclamation

distinguishing between spirits

tongues

interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. God decides who gets what, and when. You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts - limbs, organs, cells - but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of His one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which Christ has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of His resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain - His Spirit - where we all come to drink. The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part. You are Christ's body - that's who you are!" 1 Corinthians 12. 1-13. 27

One of the most gifted pastors I know is Bob Olmstead. He was a wise, experienced, compassionate, and confident pastor. When I was his intern at Palo Alto First United Methodist, I read an article about the sixteen areas a congregation would

expect their pastor to excel in. I remember going to Bob's office in tears because I couldn't think of sixteen of anything I excelled at. Bob told me that no pastor excels in sixteen areas, and that I should focus on three that captured my heart and my imagination and matched my gifts. Every year I fill out a report to the Bishop and the Cabinet, who assess my gifts and the needs of the congregation I serve. One of the questions on the report is a word that four people who love me would use to describe me. I wonder if you did this same exercise, what four words are that people who love you would use to describe you. There's room of page two next to the variety of gifts handed out by the Holy Spirit to write down a word that four people who love you would use to describe you. [PAUSE] After you write down those four words, what are four more loving words you'd you use to describe yourself? [PAUSE] If you've done this you have eight words to describe yourself... eight positive attributes and glorious gifts written down. Those words are from people who love you (including you!)

The word is "charism" that the Apostle Paul used in this letter to the church at Corinth; it means a God-given gift. Those eight words to describe you are is probably charisms, your God-given gifts. If we had more time right now you could also list your talents and interests and hobbies, but the important list this morning is your charisms. We are all given God-gifts, spiritual gifts, to use to reveal God, to bless others, and to help build God's Kingdom. God's gifts are given to us to build up the church - not the building - but the people of God and the mission of Jesus Christ. We are meant to "own" our gifts - that is to polish and use and enjoy them - like my great-aunt Blanche polished and used and enjoyed her silver tea set.

Yesterday afternoon was our yearly church conference, and our new District Superintendent, Schuyler Rhodes, preached at worship before our business meeting. He said that there's enough of everything in God's Kingdom... enough love, enough people, enough money, enough creativity... and that we are called to use our resources (I'm substituting Paul's word "charism" here) we Christians are called to use our charisms to help heal the world. Schuyler's words gave me chills... or in other words I was convicted by the Holy Spirit... that why we exist as the church, and what we are called to do, is to help heal the world. Schuyler was acting as a cheerleader for the churches in our district, preaching about moving our thinking and our theology from scarcity to abundance... but his words captured my heart and my imagination. Yesterday at the church conference I could see our congregation as clearly as I see us right now, putting aside (to use Pat Hershey's expression) our "petty personal preferences" about how each one of us thinks CHURCH should happen, and using our charisms together, to help heal the world. This could be a new vision for our church... in a culture that values things that are big, because big represents success and prosperity, what a vision to see ourselves using our charisms together to help heal the world.

Paul was also a cheerleader for the churches. He wrote: "Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits." Another translation says, "An expression of the Holy Spirit (that is, a charism) is given to each person for the common good." When we all use our Spirit-given-gifts God is revealed to us, and to others, and everyone is blessed. This idea captures my heart and my imagination, and I think is one of my gifts (those things Pastor Bob Olmstead had told me to look for): helping you identify your charisms, and inviting and encouraging

you to use them to reveal God more fully here in our midst, and to build God's kingdom, and to help heal the world. While our District Superintendent was preaching yesterday ~ the Holy Spirit was painting pictures for me ~ and one of them was our congregation using our charisms, and the light of Christ glowing stronger and brighter in the world because of us. At the church conference we approved our leaders and ministry teams for the coming year. One of the reasons to serve on a ministry team, or as spiritual leader on the Church Council, is to discover and to expand and strengthen your charisms, your Holy Spirit-given-gifts... and to learn to use them for the extraordinary work of revealing God, and blessing others, and healing the world.

Do you know that tired, old commentary on the Church: "For God so loved the world that He didn't send a committee"? We aren't meant to serve - to use our charisms - to fill slots on a committee. We're meant to use our charisms to glorify God, and to change the world. Maybe it's because I got an extra hour's sleep last night, but this idea makes me want to dance. (And if you weren't at yesterday's church conference you were spared the sight of us pastors dancing and singing to the Beatles' song, "Can't Buy Me Love". The applause afterwards was, I'm pretty sure, less appreciation and more relief that we were done!)

This is a dance-worthy idea, that the Holy Spirit has given each one of us charisms (if you read the Harry Potter books this is similar to "horcruxes" which are scattered pieces of someone's soul). The Holy Spirit has given all of us - implanted in us - pieces of God that we are meant to discover and use to glorify the Giver, God. God gives and we give back, and God gives and we give back... and we are all blessed, and the Kingdom of God is revealed, and the world is being healed. Thank You Jesus!

This month is our finance campaign, and a letter was sent last week to ask everyone to begin praying about how to use our money as a charism. Generous giving is a spiritual gift. In another of Paul's letters, to the church in Rome, he wrote, "If your charism is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If you are a preacher, see to it that your sermons are strong and helpful. If God has given you money, be generous in helping others with it." This month as we move towards Thanksgiving, as we are more aware of all we are grateful for, my prayer is that you will pray over and delight in those eight words we started with... eight words that people who love you would use to describe you... possibly these are your charisms... your Holy Spirit-given gifts.

My friend Donna said to me once, "If I'd have known how difficult the spiritual life was I'd never have started down this path." It was said with humor and also with some angst, because the spiritual life, the Christian life, is challenging. Following Jesus Christ demands that we sacrifice our desires for His desires, His plan, and that we take off our masks and drop our contrived appearances and be conformed into Jesus' image. It's hard. Thankfully we have a Savior who walks with us, who has been one of us, and we have sisters and brothers to walk with us. Knowing that He would die and leave His friends, His disciples, Jesus had a last meal with them, where He offered bread and wine as signs of His body and His blood, as signs of His continued presence with them. We come to His Table this morning to eat and drink of His sacrifice, and to remember Jesus' presence with us always. I invite you to join Joe and Pat and me for the Sacrament of Communion, on the insert in the worship program.

