

Winfield United Church Reflection – May 31, 2020

Gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:4-13

Today we are considering Paul's writing to the church at Corinth. This is a community that has experienced much conflict. Paul finds the Corinthian church divided over leadership; there is jealousy and time is spent arguing over whose gifts are most important. You are after all, only human, Paul tells them. But now Paul wants to remind the community 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
proclamation
speaking in tongues

All of these gifts are freely given without discrimination for the health and wellbeing of the community. There are no conditions tied to the gift... no obligation of reciprocity other than to use the gift you have to its fullest potential. Spiritual gifts... how do we hear Paul's encouragement in light of the events taking place in Minneapolis, Washington and other cities across the United States following the death of George Floyd at the hands of Police? It is hard to imagine that just a short day's drive to the south of us, our neighbors are experiencing racial tension and polarization and does not seem ever to be addressed nor does it subside. It is a wound that never is able to heal. We wonder where it will all end. How will the relations between those who believe they broker power and people of color ever be reconciled? I try not to be hopeless but George Floyd's death was not an isolated incident and it won't be the last. I read a powerful blog post this past week, written by a black pastor. He spoke of what it means to grow up as a black man in the US and the talk that every mother gives to her son on how to live in a white man's world. The pastor shares his own personal experience of watching his father pulled out of the their car as he drove him to school one morning by police and subsequently

detained in jails for days, long enough to lose his job because he didn't show up. The writer felt tremendous guilt because if he had only woken up five minutes earlier, he wouldn't have missed the bus and the outcome for his father may have been different.

The pastor concludes his post by recalling the death Jesus died, the persecution and crucifixion he faced because he gave a message that was unpopular by the authorities. He says, and I quote, "It takes another Pentecost to happen for each and all of us to yield to the redemptive power of the Spirit and to use our tongues to call out for justice."

These are sobering thoughts that give us pause on this day as we celebrate the gifts of the Spirit...but as we come to our tables this day to share in Holy Communion, may we remember the central tenet of Jesus life and work: that a Spirit surrounds us, is ever-present, animating gifts to be shared with our communities and our world to lift the lowly and the oppressed. May we also remember that the gifts Paul speaks of belong to the poor, the marginalized, those thrown to the ground.

I close this message this morning with a poem written by well-known liturgist Maren Tirabassi, called Serenity Prayer for Pentecost...and as we go forward may we find hope and encouragement in her words:

Serenity Prayer for Pentecost

God grant me the serenity
to let the walk-with-me,
talk-with-me, fix-me, hold-my-hand
personal garden Jesus
just ascend.

God grant me the courage
to stop trying, trying, trying
to find my own voice
long enough
to be willing to lend it
to someone whose words
I do not understand,

someone who gets no hearing
in this world.

And God grant me the wisdom
to recognize that the Spirit
is doing all this
Pentecost
with community in mind.
Amen.

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