

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 - Pentecost 15.5.2016

Spirit-filled Church

⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. ⁸ To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹ The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. ¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have. [NLT]

How on earth will we ever carry out the task Jesus has given the church? This question did not find itself into the pages of the Bible - and yet it is not too much of a stretch imagining those first disciples thinking exactly that. When they looked at themselves and their limitations, how were they going to go about carrying out the commission to 'make disciples of all the peoples of the world'?

When we look at ourselves - as the church - today, we see that these questions are still there: How will we do what Jesus has called us to do as his church - right here where we are? We look at ourselves - at our congregations - and we also see our limitations. How are we going to carry out the Great Commission of our Lord, if we struggle to just keep those who are members of the church from leaving.

Paul urges us to look away from ourselves - not to seek what we find on earth, if you like, but to look for him who comes from outside our day to day lives. We are to know that we have the promise of being the

Spirit-filled Church

Being filled with the Spirit - There was an important component in all of this,

however. Jesus had instructed them to **not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before.** (Acts 1:4) They were to wait for the Holy Spirit, and now - as we heard it again today - the Holy Spirit came on them in an almost visible way.

The Spirit fills the church: He fills us, as members of his church with his many and varied gifts. For all who see the size of the task we have as church of our Lord - here in our city and country, for all who wonder, 'How will we ever reach all those people', - we need to start at the beginning. We need to look first of all for the working of the Spirit - for him, who was promised to us. We need to wait and look for him, who is present in his church. The answer does not lie in doing more, but in receiving more - more of this Spirit.

The Spirit fills his church. Paul writes, **A spiritual gift is given to each of us ...** Each member of the church - and that means of this congregation also - has been given a gift by the Spirit. The gifts were never meant to be concentrated on a small group in the church - and for individual congregations to be run as a kind of 'one-man-show'. We all have our gifts - so that **each of us ... can help each other.**

There are different gifts listed here in this passage. This list is not given to us so that we can apply for the gift we would like. You may get a gift which is not even included in this list. Don't despair! The list Paul gives here is not all-inclusive. At other places he names other things. The important thing is, however: The Holy Spirit gives the congregation those gifts which are needed for its own special situation and in its own time.

We may strive for certain gifts, because we think that they are the really important ones. In Corinth the problem had been that some gifts were considered more important than others - and of course those who had these gifts thought of themselves as more important than other members of the church.

In the Spirit-filled church there is no hierarchy - there is not one who is more important than the others. What we have received is for the mutual benefit of all members of the church. We are to help one another, and to share the

blessings we have through the Spirit, not to compare ourselves with others, in the mistaken belief that we are not as good as - or that we are better than -, others because of the gifts we have received.

Yet, it is not about the value we attach to a specific gift - that is what Paul attempts to bring home here. Even if you should think that your gift has no special value, your congregation - the church of our Lord - needs it. Paul says that each one has been given a spiritual gift so that **each of us ... can help each other**. We need each other - the congregation really lives from the fact that each one brings his / her gift to bear in the church.

Spirit-filled Church - where he fills the church, where he comes with his gifts, the church will be changed and renewed. We can't pray for the Spirit to come, and hope that he will just leave things unchanged. It's a bit like a story I once heard of a person arriving late for a meeting, and noticing how stuffy the room was. As he opened some windows, the wind blew papers all over the place, and there was a scramble to sort things out - but this may also cause seeing papers that were covered up, and had been forgotten.

When the Holy Spirit comes - and he does, where we 'open the windows' of our hearts and of our congregation - he might 'blow things all over the place'. The thing is, without him doing this, our churches grow to be a bit stuffy - as if there is not enough oxygen to really breathe, and live as we ought to as the Church of our Lord. Opening windows to his coming, may cause us to scramble a bit to get things straightened out - but as we do so, we see things in a new light.

The Spirit comes - and he brings his life into places that have got too stuffy, because we like to control how things happen, and what is done. We have rules about what is to be done, and how to do things. We have rules which limit certain things to certain people in the church. Certainly rules have their place, but we need to look at them again occasionally - especially if these rules have been in place for centuries. Do our rules limit the working of the Spirit? - do they close the 'window' he wants to blow through, to bring about the

change he wants.

If we are to carry out the task we have been given as the church of our Lord, and if we are to be his visible presence here where we live, we need the Spirit to fill us with his many and varied gifts.

The Spirit is here - he fills his church with his gifts and his grace. And if we are to know how we will be able to do everything as the church of our Lord, it is by not closing the 'windows', so that he can blow his power and his guidance into our lives, into our congregation.