

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Sermon title: Holy Spirit (2)

Text: I Cor 12:1-13 (Ezekiel 47:1-10)

I don't know if you've ever experienced flooding: the warning, the first innocent trickles that then rise gradually and irresistibly: the rising water matched by rising desperation that there is nothing that can be done to halt that rise

Flooding looks to become a regular part of life for millions of people in our world – not just over there but over here too

The OT prophet Ezekiel had a vision of a river in flood, flowing from the temple of God (Ch 47:1-10)

- unlike the destructive flooding we may be thinking of, this was the life-giving flooding necessary to bring rich soil to floodplains like the Nile delta

This image of the work of the HS that Ezekiel received is another in his important foretelling ministries about the era of the Spirit that was coming

Earlier he had spoken of hearts of stone becoming softened like hearts of flesh

Another time he said it would be like dry bones on a valley battlefield which then come together, are clothed in flesh and are then animated with breath or Spirit

One day, one day...

In the life of the early church that day comes with the day of Pentecost

And we now live in it: the era of the Spirit animating individuals spiritually to know God in intimate relationship, and empowering them for service and, crucially bringing unity

And, as we heard last week, the One crucial for this, who takes concepts and intellectual convictions and turns them into lived experience is the Holy Spirit: the Spirit who Bishop John V Taylor called The Go-Between God

The Spirit is the bond of love between Father and Son is the bond of love between Father, Son and us

The Spirit calls us to share in all that God is doing in the life of the world, the church and the individual – what theologians call the Missio Dei, God's mission

And as the Spirit does that, He equips us with gifts

And it is about gifts that we are thinking this week

Just like scattered bones brought into a single body, so individual believers are knit together into the Body called Church

In I Cor 12 Paul takes up this great theme

READ I Cor 12:4-7

In this passage we see an intertwining of the ministries of the Spirit in the world, the church, the individual

The “all” of v6 has echoes of the role of the Spirit in creation and in the ongoing life of our world: life-giver and inspirer of creativity

But Paul’s credal opening of this chapter - no-one can say Jesus is Lord except by the HS places – echoes recreation of the individual (you must be born again of water and the Spirit, says Jesus in Jn 3:5)

The strong implication is that all that then follows in 1 Cor 12 is about the particular ministry of the HS in individual believers and together in the Church: these are the everyone of verse 6

READ 1 Cor 12: v4-7

These verses are foundational for a theology of the gifts of the Holy Spirit

By “gifts” we mean the following

Something freely given: not earned or deserved – indeed the word we translate as gifts in grk (*charis*) is from the word for grace

Those gifts will be varied: READ v4

They will have an identifiable outcome – they are “manifestations” of the Spirit (v7)

We often use the word “gifts” to mean abilities or attributes – in this passage they may well be that, something we have in an ongoing way: but these sorts of gifts may just as likely be a one-off gift through us to another from God: a one-off grace for that moment

Where it is an ongoing attribute that natural attribute becomes a gift of the Spirit when a natural ability is now dedicated to God, made “holy”

Or it might also be a supernatural ability.

There are different list of the gifts of the Spirit in the NT – the one we have here in 1 Cor 12 focuses more on the supernatural gifts, but others have gifts of leadership, creativity and they are no means closed, exhaustive lists

Crucially these gifts are in all believers and for the common good of all believers: READ v7

That point is reinforced in v11

So if these gifts are in all believers and for the common good of all believers I need to ask you:

Do you know what gift God has given you?

Have you unwrapped it?

And are you using it – and finding personal fulfilment and joy in that and seeing it as making a difference in the lives of others?

Undergirding this Bible passage is the recognition that God has created us as unique human beings, in love he has saved us and, through the Holy Spirit is recreating us in the image of His Son, Jesus: through the same Spirit He is at work in the world and invites us to join-in in the particular roles, stages of life, ongoing responsibilities He has placed us in here and now

One of the key ways a local Church can help people grow as disciples is to help them to recognise those gifts and think about how to use them in their work, their families, their community and also the church

Another is to create a culture and structures that are about people’s gifts rather than volunteering

The shift from a church based on volunteering to one based on gifts is often a great sense of freedom and affirmation. People no longer offer time out of obligation but out of conviction: that this is a way that I can use my God-given gifts

It can also be a way of a church discerning where to put energy and efforts: if God gives gifts to the church for ministry, discerning where the gifts lie also helps to discern where He is at work and inviting us to join in. What do we feel called by God to do, but now in the power of the Spirit and what might He be calling us to lay down and now stop

As we move forward together doing so based on the gifts given by the Spirit is going to be really important in deciding what we do and how we will do it.

> A Prayer for Fresh Anointings by John Gunstone

Almighty God by the power of your living Word
you have created all things,
and by your Holy Spirit you renew the face of the earth.
Pour out abundantly on your servants who thirst for you
the water of life.
Bring them to the joy of Pentecost
and to the cleansing fire of your love.
Grant that they,
who are sealed by your Holy Spirit,
may be given gifts to serve you
and the will and power to proclaim you,
in the church and wherever you send them.
We ask this through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.