

Concerning Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

The wind of the Spirit blew through Our Savior Lutheran Church but it did not seem to touch the life of Ken Kehrli. Ken had been a faithful member of Our Savior all his life. He was baptized there, confirmed there, married there. And yet, when the Spirit blew new life in to the lives of so many in the church, Ken felt excluded.

Some called this blowing of God the “Charismatic movement.” Whatever it was called it certainly touched lives of some of the members of Our Savior in special ways. Some spoke in tongues for the first time in their lives. Others spoke words of prophecy while others interpreted prophetic words and still others experienced the power of healing.

Ken knew these people whose lives had been touched by God in new ways. He was excited for them. He joined them in some of their special prayer meetings. Ken’s friends knew the depth of his faith. This was not in question, at least not in the beginning. Ken was welcomed into their fellowship. He was excited to be there. He experienced the gifts of the Spirit as others exercised them. None of these new gifts were manifested in his life, however. That’s where the problem arose.

Ken’s newly “spirit-filled” friends wanted to pray for him with the laying on of hands so that he might also be filled with the Spirit and experience the work of God’s Spirit in his life in new ways. Ken was more than willing to be prayed for. So the prayer group prayed for Ken. They prayed

– but nothing happened. No new gifts of the Spirit became manifest in Ken’s life.

They prayed for Ken at the next meeting as well. And the next and the next and the next! But—nothing! It seemed to Ken that the focus was on the gift of speaking in tongues. “Everyone ought to have this gift,” the others told him as they prayed and prayed for him. “Speaking in tongues is a sign of increased holiness,” they told Ken.

The prayers did not seem to work, however. Ken did not speak in tongues. He did not prophesy nor interpret prophetic utterances nor acquire new and greater faith nor experience new healing power. All the prayers seemed to be in vain. What was the matter with him? What was wrong with his faith life? Why couldn’t he speak in tongues? In the company of his “spirit-filled” friends he could only see himself as a spiritual failure.

One day Ken’s uncle came to visit him. Ken knew his uncle Wilbur to be a man of great faith. Ken told Wilbur of his experiences with his spiritual friends and of his own despair over God’s lack of presence in his life. Uncle Wilbur listened to Ken’s story of pain and replied in great wisdom. “The Holy Spirit has been at work in your life ever since you were baptized,” Uncle Wilbur began. “It is the Spirit that has taught you to have faith in Jesus. It is the Spirit that has given you your many gifts for the good of God’s people. It would serve you well to look to the Giver of the gifts and the gifts you have been given rather than looking at other people and their gifts. The Holy Spirit doesn’t have a copy machine. Only you have been given the gifts that you have.

The Spirit doesn't want you to be like everyone else. The Spirit gives each one of us a different assortment of gifts. Our spiritual task is to use the gifts the Spirit gives us for the common good."

What do you think? Did Uncle Wilbur do a good job of answering Ken's question about spiritual gifts? Was it similar to St. Paul's answer to the Corinthians? They had asked him to address this issue. And so he begins our reading, *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.*

And uninformed they were. There was no shortage of spiritual gifts among them. But there was also no shortage of pride or jealousy. Some thought they were better than others because they had better gifts. Others bought into this ranking of gifts and felt jealous because other people had better gifts than they did. There was no shortage of division and quarrels – the haves versus the have nots – the super Christians versus the spiritually stunted.

Paul's point, like that of Uncle Wilbur, is that the attention should be on the Giver of the gifts, and how the gifts received are used. It's not about personal glory; it's about the common good.

Our savior did not come to earth to be Jesus Christ Superstar. He came to be a suffering servant. For Him it was never about personal glory; it was about the common good – saving His people from the wrath their sins deserved.

Which sins are those? Your sin of thinking your gifts are better and so you are better than others. Your sin of

complaining about your gifts and coveting the gifts of others. Your sin of not using the gifts you have been given.

It was to earn for you the forgiveness of these sins that Jesus lived without sin. It was deliver you from God's wrath that He took your sins on Himself and died for them. It was to give you new life that Jesus rose from the grave and has gone ahead of you to prepare a place for you to be with Him. Jesus earned all of these gifts for you. The Holy Spirit delivers them to you.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The Giver of all good gifts is at work in your life. He has blessed you with faith to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. He has blessed you with gifts for you to use for the common good. To this we can all say, "Amen!"