

Sermon 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Come Together (Right Now)

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

January 19th, 2025

If you were here last Sunday, who might remember that the worship service was all about baptism. And especially the validation we experience in baptism, God's validation. And at this point, let me repeat the end of last Sunday's sermon:

'In baptism, we and all are precious in God's eyes, always. We and all are validated. My prayer is that this validation lifts us up, transforms us, and gives us the courage to live fully into our baptismal promises.' And guess what: this is what I'm going to talk about today – this 'living fully into our baptismal promises'.

Now baptism is one of those thin places when and where God's Holy Spirit enters in – into the baptismal waters, and also into the one who is baptized. In many baptismal liturgies, we even 'seal' the one who is baptized with the Holy Spirit. The thing about God's Holy Spirit is: she's fickle and unpredictable. Jesus himself says that the Spirit 'blows where she wills, you don't know where she's coming from and where she is going'. God's Spirit at times may give us the peace we need when life is crazy. The same Spirit may put a fire under our bums and blow us out of our safe places, as she did with Jesus' disciples on Pentecost Day. And, just as a side note, I am referring to the Holy Spirit as a 'she' because, in Hebrew – the language of the Old Testament – and in Aramaic – the language Jesus primarily spoke – the word for 'spirit', which is also the word for wind and breath, is feminine; so the Holy Spirit indeed is a 'she', but has been transgender through time and translation.

This Spirit is with us from the day of our baptism. We are possessed, if you will, possessed by God – and by God's Spirit. Which, if you ask me, is preferable to being possessed by other powers or unhealthy habits.

And: we are all given special gifts by God's Spirit, this benevolent life force. The lesson we just heard, from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, names some of them: the spirit of wisdom, of teaching, of healing, the working of powerful deeds, of prophecy, and then the more obscure one we usually don't trust as Protestants of a certain ilk: the speaking in tongues. In other places, Paul names other gifts of the Spirit, like leadership, generosity, compassion, and prayer.

In short: as those who are baptized, we are not only validated, but endowed with certain gifts – and those vary from person to person – and we are highly encouraged to put them to good use. And not just for the sake of using them, but, as Paul says, ‘for the common good’. The Spirit builds up the body of Christ. Already in baptism, we become part of something much bigger than ourselves, a community, and family that transcends time and space. The Spirit is all about transforming us into the community of saints – a community in which we all contribute of the gifts we have received. As we saw in the children’s sermon, the picture is just not complete when a part – your part, my part – is missing.

Now for me, the assignment of this lectionary lesson from 1st Corinthians felt like an inspired nudge from God on this day that we will get together for the annual meeting. During the meeting, there will be reports – reports by some here who have shared their gifts of the Spirit in more prominent ways, as spiritual and lay leaders who make sure that things work smoothly around here. I haven’t been around that long, but long enough to know that Old Steeple has some faithful and dedicated folks with amazing gifts. Amen? Amen!

And then there will be elections of council officers / team leaders. And you will notice that we *currently* don’t have enough folks who are willing to take on the leadership on certain important ministries here at Old Steeple, namely our welcoming and outreach ministries. Now can we agree that those ministries are crucial? And we need another auditor. And we need people for a nominating committee. And representatives for this year’s New York conference meeting in Albany. And people who represent Old Steeple on an association level. As your pastor, I will be involved in all these things by default, but PLEASE, friends: I’m just one piece of the puzzle. Help!

Especially in regards to outreach and welcoming: YOU have the special gift of the Spirit of knowing the larger community that Old Steeple is a part of – I don’t. At least not yet.

At the brainstorming luncheon back in November, on All Saints Day, led by Rev. Bonnie, Nancy came up with this great idea of a ‘committee of saints’, basically a pool of people who are willing to jump in and help out and share their gifts of the Spirit whenever and wherever needed, so it’s not a real committee with meetings and minutes and all that stuff. I still think this is a brilliant idea, and at the annual meeting, you are invited to literally put your name in the hat for that. This way, we know whom to call and ask to help out, here and there. You may think you are just

a little puzzle piece, not even a really interesting one, maybe just a piece of blue sky, but without you, the picture is not complete. You, God's beloved, endowed at baptism with God's Holy Spirit, are important! We all are called to use our gifts for the common good.

It is one thing to wait for God's Holy Spirit to come in from the outside, like she did on Pentecost Day, to make a big ruckus, to stir things up, and to inspire and excite people. But in the meantime, let's not neglect the Holy Spirit that's already here, in each and every one of us. If we allow this Spirit to flow freely, I'm quite sure we'll be surprised at her power to transform. So my appeal at this point to all gathered here is to come together – right now – and put all our heads and hearts and puzzle pieces of the Spirit together. To live into our baptismal promises, together.

And on this weekend, that we observe and celebrate the birthday of one of the spiritual giants of our time, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I would like to close with one of his prayers that is very appropriate for our context: 'Use me, God. Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be, and what I can do, and use it for a purpose greater than myself.' Amen