

In the One Spirit¹
Pentecost Sunday
Marilyn Zehr, June 8 2014
1 Corinthians 12: 3b-13

We were all made to drink of the One Spirit: from verse 13 of today's reading, "In the One Spirit we were baptized so that there are no longer Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free – and we were made to drink of the One Spirit." Just as water is essential to all life, the One Spirit is in fact essential to our life as a community of God's people.

We are on the verge of making important decisions again today about the next steps of our life together. I hope you are able to stay for the meeting this afternoon.

And here we are on Pentecost Sunday, celebrating the gift of the Spirit to the church at a time when it is also critical that we pay attention to the way the Spirit is working and moving among us.

The Spirit of Pentecost, is a unifying force, bringing about a unifying recognition of truth, even while it does not force uniformity. In fact, it does exactly the opposite. The Spirit will swoop in whenever there is an open door and grant its gifts in wild diversity among us. This diversity is essential to the life of the community, as I've said, and this essential diversity is exactly what Paul explains so well in this text to the congregation in Corinth.

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Paul tells the Corinthians (and I'm paraphrasing a bit)
there are a variety of gifts, but one Spirit
there are many ministries or tasks to complete, but one Lord
there are many different energizing influences that make it possible to
complete those tasks, but only One God.

But why the many, the variety, this essential diversity and why does it
matter?

A famous moment in a well-known romantic comedy will help me make
my point.

The movie is Jerry Maguire. Near the end of the movie, lead actress
Renee Zellweger, as Dorothy Boyd, is in a room with a group of women
bemoaning their broken or destructive relationships. Tom Cruise as
Jerry Maguire comes into the room and begins his famous speech.

"We live in a cynical world, a cynical world...

I work in a world of tough competitors,"

and then he stops.

Jerry and Dorothy look at each other for several long seconds, where the
depth of pain and longing is absolutely visible on their faces.

Finally he says,

"I love you,

You complete me."

As he tries to continue, she interjects with a soft, but firm,

“Shut up, shut up. You had me at hello.”

This memorable and often quoted scene reveals the power of what happens when individuals realize that in a cynical and competitive world it's simply impossible to go it alone. The scene is powerful because we recognize something in it. We might recognize the longings in these individuals as something that at one time or another has happened to us, a moment or moments when we become aware of our own weaknesses and limitations, and in those moments recognize our human longing is to find something or someone who can complete us, strengthen us, make us feel whole. Jerry Maguire tried the alternative and in a culture like his and ours it's a path that even discourages needing or relying on others. Rather we live in a culture that honors individuality, strength and competition and so many of us learn well the lesson of soldiering on in the face of adversity. Work two jobs to make ends meet, just tough it out for a time, pull up your bootstraps and carry on. But the tough exterior of this soldiering attitude has trouble letting in the essential work of the One Spirit. This work of the One Spirit requires a world of many and variety in order to make itself fully manifest. (12:7) To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Although it's great on the one hand that Jerry in this movie recognizes that he needs more than himself for completeness unfortunately the lie in the movie is that he needs only one other person to complete him.

Let me give another example.

Earlier this week, I was introduced to Harvey Dyck's book *Path of Thorns: Soviet Mennonite Life under Communist and Nazi Rule*. This book includes the translated memoirs of Jacob Neufeld. Interestingly, one of the speakers at Harvey's book launch laid this book side by side with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One day in the Life of Ivan*, a prisoner in a Soviet Labour camp. At the end of the day Ivan feels productive and "almost happy" about his individual ability to survive his torturous experiences. Many readers of this novel have found great hope in the power of the individual spirit to maintain a sense of humanity despite unimaginable adversity.

Jacob Neufeld, also imprisoned in a forced labour camp, has a very different base for hope and survival. When he thinks his tortured body and soul can't go on, Jacob records a profound experience of God to whom he finally and fully surrenders. Jacob Neufeld defines his humanity as inextricably linked with God and the community of which he is part.

I also talked with Anne Konrad this week about her book, *Red Quarter Moon, a search for family in the shadow of Stalin*. I asked her if her decades of research and countless conversations with found relatives revealed to her anything about the faith of those who survived the Russian revolution, the Stalinist era and the ravages of war. She told me that it was those who were able to maintain some sort of community who kept their faith. Those who became isolated were the ones who lost their faith.

The gifts of the One Spirit are for community. To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. One commentator that I read pointed out that these gifts of the Spirit were not and are not for personal spiritual edification, nor are the gifts of the Spirit equivalent to our natural abilities. The gifts of the Spirit are gifts that by grace can go well beyond our natural abilities. Recalling the Pentecost story when everyone understood the message of the gospel in his or her own language, something extraordinary had happened as a result of the outpouring of the Spirit.

It is the One Spirit that completes us (*brings us to the wholeness of the new humanity in Christ*) by placing a diversity of gifts among us.

In this text there is a list, though not exhaustive, of some of the gifts of the Spirit.

the utterance of wisdom,

the utterance of knowledge, (note that knowledge and wisdom are not equated but equally important and not necessarily residing in the same person)

the gift of faith,

the ability to heal,

to work miracles,

prophecy,

discernment of Spirits,

various kinds of tongues and interpretation of tongues.

Finally what does it mean to say that the One Spirit completes us? Here, let me bring us back to a paraphrase of Paul's Trinitarian language in this passage, verses 4-6.

There are a variety of gifts, but one Spirit.

There are many ministries or tasks to complete, but one Lord.

There are many different energizing influences that make it possible to complete those tasks, but only One God.

The Spirit is one facet of God as revealed to us through Christ Jesus.

One can't have Pneumatology without Christology.

The Spirit as an active and energizing facet of God ushers us into the full humanity that we see in Christ. The point of the gifts of the Spirit made manifest differently in each one of us ensures that we cannot obtain that full and complete humanity in Christ without each other. In this text, Paul goes on to use his famous and often quoted metaphor 12:12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

And so when we are being this body, it isn't just a good idea to listen to each other and hear each other so that we can discern the work of the Spirit together. It is essential. We simply can't be the church we are called to be on our own or as individuals. It's simply not possible. We need each other for our very life.

My prayer on this Pentecost Sunday is that we drink deeply of life giving and sustaining water of this One Spirit.

And may the gifts and fruits of the Spirit be renewed and strengthened in our lives so that we continue this year in God's grace, the footsteps of the Son and the love of the Holy Spirit. Amen.