

“Spiritual Gifts and Miracles”
A Sermon by Rev. Martha (Missy) Shiverick
Cleveland Heights, Ohio
January 14, 2007
I Corinthians 12: 1-11
John 2:1-11

The passage from Corinthians is one we all have heard. Paul is writing out of a division that has taken place within the Christian community in Corinth over whose Spiritual gifts are more valuable. Did speaking in tongues make you a more valuable member of the community than those who taught Christ's doctrines? If you could preach should you be the leader over someone who performed miracles? Paul's answer, of course, is that all are gifts of the Spirit and are equally valuable. The person who has leadership skills is as valuable as the person who has teaching skills and all skills come from God. As I read it aloud, think about what gifts God has given you. I know it is so much easier to think about what gifts we do not possess but I challenge you to think about what possible gift or gifts you have been given. Listen to God's word.

(Read 1Corinthians 12: 1-11)

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Jesus had Spiritual gifts. As the Son of God, he had every spiritual gift that Paul lists. The account of his first miracle is this morning's Gospel lesson. Miracles were on Paul's list of spiritual gifts. This miracle is the one where water is turned into wine at the wedding party. Although there are many explanations as to why this would be Jesus first miracle, I think what is more important is that he possessed the spiritual gift of miracles and that he was well pleased with the institution of marriage. In fact the reason we are able to say that Jesus blesses marriage as a part of our wedding ceremony is because of this miracle. Jesus found pleasure in it. Jesus gave a miracle as his gift while attending the wedding, the gift of the celebration. Listen again to the word of God. Also, as I read the passage, listen to the last verse. It tells why miracles were performed. Jesus turned the water into wine so that His glory, God's glory might be manifested and that his disciples would believe in him. They were done for God's purpose as we should use all the Spiritual gifts we are given. Listen now for the word of the Lord.

(Read John 2:1-11)

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

When I was in seminary, I asked Hank Andersen, who was then the Senior Pastor at Fairmount, what were his spiritual practices. He told me that he tried to start every day in his office by reading the Bible and praying and meditating on the message. I do not know how often he actually got to do this, but I occasionally try and follow his practice myself. So...this past Monday morning I came into my office and read again the Scripture passages assigned today so that I could begin to think about how to preach from them, how they might relate to Martin Luther King Sunday, and how to bring the passages alive and relevant to us today. After all that is really the assignment of the preacher on Sunday. To make God's word come alive and be meaningful in our day as it was when it was written. I read the passage from Corinthians, and knew it was one that is very familiar to many, and thought about what new insight I could bring to it. I thought how this was the scripture passage I used to use while leading New Member classes when I was first ordained. I would begin the classes with a Bible Study on this passage so that I could get the new members from the very beginning thinking about their unique gifts and interests. Although it is important to join a church thinking what you can gain from it, when joining, we should also think how our membership adds to the ministry of the church. We all have been given gifts. They are all different. Jesus might have possessed them all, but each of us brings something to God's ministry as well.

The rest of the 12th chapter of Corinthians uses the imagery of the body to explain why it is important for Christian communities to have individuals in them that possess different spiritual gifts and how each different gift is important to the whole. You do not want more elbows on your body than you need, but thank God we can bend our arms and reach our mouths to eat. Elbows might not at first seem important, but imagine life without them. If Paul wrote to the Corinthians in the post-industrial world, he would have used the imagery of a machine to explain this. Machines have many different parts and their interconnectedness all work for the greater purpose of the machine. Every bolt and every nut has a purpose.

After a few minutes of meditating on this, I went to my Monday morning task of answering emails that have come in through out the weekend. Within the emails was one from a member which could not have illustrated this passage from Corinthians into modern terms any clearer. The sender was describing the podcasts he has been working on of our worship services. Yes, you now can go to itunes and download sermons from Fairmount church and listen to them on your computer or ipod. The sender of the email

wrote with enthusiastic descriptions things that I had no conception of. Intro blurbs, megabytes, external archiving, deletion, and increasing storage space. This is not, and I mean NOT, my area. We are moving into this cyber tech world and I personally thank God, that members of our community have been given the spiritual techno-gifts to get us there. Clearly God has given this man the spiritual gift of computer technology, a gift that not all of us have and a gift which will benefit God's community here at Fairmount.

Paul describes the many spiritual gifts that he experienced. Uttering knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, and discernment of spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, and of course interpreting the speaking of tongues. What was important, Paul said, was not what the spiritual gift was but that even though there are varieties of spiritual gifts, they all come from the same place. They come from God who inspires and gives them all. Spiritual gifts come from God, are used for God's purpose, and it is God who decides who gets what gift. But the important message in both the Epistle lesson this morning and in the Gospel account of Jesus' miracle is that these gifts are given as God wills and are to be used to and for God's purpose.

Which brings us to this celebration this weekend: Martin Luther King Jr. Day. I must admit it is a very intimidating day to preach. I see the purpose of the holiday in several ways for us the Christian Community. One is to hold up and remember a saint of our history. The second is to teach that Dr King's message was the Judeo-Christian message of justice and love. Dr. King preached our Gospel and taught God's vision of shalom. There is a reason to learn of his teachings in both the secular and religious world. The third is to remind ourselves that this vision based on God's call, is our calling and our work as well. Dr. King preached about God's kingdom, but it is every Christian's calling to help bring it to earth. As we prayed the Lord's Prayer this morning, we became partners with each other in the sacred calling of bringing God's rule on earth as it is in heaven. And that was The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr's message to each of us.

So if you are like me, you then turn within your self and say, well what does this have to do with me. I see God's vision. I hear the call that Dr King did, but I am not him. And that is where this morning's scripture texts come in. Of course we are not Dr King. But God has given each of us spiritual gifts to do God's work and bring God's realm on earth. Perhaps it took someone with Dr. King's spiritual gifts to start the movement we must now finish.

Pastor's secretary Donna Evans came to work this week and told me of a sign that was on the Catholic Church on Lake Shore Blvd. in Euclid this week. She drove by it each morning on her way to Fairmount. It said, "Laundry is the only thing that should be separated by color." This simple sign must have been quoted by hundreds of people who drove by the church all week. No, it wasn't as eloquent as a speech by Dr King and it won't be used in a speech in Washington DC at a march that millions of people attend, but it might get a lot of people thinking about what unites us being a lot stronger than what divides us. Given the issues that the City of Euclid has been working on, I thank God for the Spiritual gifts given to whomever makes that sign each week. They have done much to promote God's vision of justice.

And what about the article in the Plain Dealer yesterday which questioned whether Jewish jokes were anti-Semitic? Haven't we all been in the position of someone telling a joke in a group of friends which is off color. It is based on prejudices and puts down either women, gays, ethnicities, or a particular race. If it is allowed to go unchecked, it promotes institutional bigotry and racism is not visioned in a world where God's unconditional love is for all. It takes the spiritual gifts of courage and love to confront and stand up and say that jokes like these are not funny. So I thank God for the person who wrote the article that caused me and perhaps others to wrestle with our role in God's call to justice through correct humor.

Not everyone has the same Spiritual gift and I have not yet met anyone who possesses Jesus' gift of miracles that can change water into wine. However God has given each of us gifts and it is our role, our quest to find what they are. We need to look at God's vision of Love, of Justice, of Shalom and claim it as ours as well. Then with the faith that God has equipped us to serve, we will go forward and do God's work and be God's own. Amen.

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