



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

January 14, 2007

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 133-134

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Gospel: John 2:1-11

### **God's Gifted People Reveal God's Glory**

Has anyone ever told you that you remind them of one of your parents? Did you ever hear that in your life? Have you ever noticed, if you are a parent, how your children start reminding you of yourself at times? That is alright when it's something nice, but it's not so good when you hear them using the same phrases you use when you are angry in the checkout line at the grocery store and they start throwing a fit and you can see yourself in them. It's not all that cute anymore, is it? You and I, when we resemble our parents or when we resemble other human beings and reveal something about what we have learned from them, we reveal both the good and the bad. That is not always good.

Today we begin a series of readings that we are going to study from 1 Corinthians. We are going to look at 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 over the next few weeks and it is going to deal with spiritual gifts. We are going to see that we are God's gifted people, but we also are going to be reminded of this Epiphany truth that God's gifted people reveal his glory as we put those gifts into practice. That is one of the reasons he gives us those gifts—so that we reveal what God is like as we use them.

There is nothing bad that we can reveal about our God—not like when it comes to acting like our parents—but we still have that sinful nature inside of us that we need to fight against because at times it wants to reveal things about what is in our hearts that are not God-pleasing and that don't reflect well on our God. So as we consider this truth that as God's gifted people, each one of us here has gifts that God has given us to reveal his glory.

First of all, we have to remind ourselves that he gives different gifts to different people. Different means different. That is important. That is something we have to remember because our sinful nature doesn't think that. Secondly, as we look at God's Word, we see that different—all these different gifts given to all these different people—really reveals how glorious our God is in what he is able to do through frail human beings like you and me.

I don't know how much you remember about the church of God in Corinth. Corinth was on a major trade route. It had two major ports near. It was a large city—200,000 free men at the time when Paul wrote to them and some say 400,000 slaves living in the city. It was a very large city. It was also a very immoral city. They took the name of Corinth and made it a verb in the Greek language. To Corinthianize wasn't a good thing. It meant to be blatantly and abundantly sexually immoral. That is what the name came to mean.

In the city of Corinth they had all kinds of temples about the time of Paul. There were probably about 9-11 temples. The largest one might have been the temple to Aphrodite—the goddess of love. The worship of Aphrodite involved shrine prostitutes. A thousand shrine prostitutes were said to be there about the time of St. Paul. So the city isn't a bright shining beacon of moral virtue. The city, for this new group of Christians—mostly Gentiles, some Jews—would have lots of things facing them and tempting them, and if you remember anything about the letter, they had a lot of things from within the church that were causing them problems—divisions, clicks here and there—I follow Paul, I follow Peter, I follow Jesus. Paul had to write and tell them they were all nuts. They should be following Christ and not the messenger of Christ. There was incest between families and they were saying, "Look at how wonderful we are to be accepting and loving of this." Paul had to write and tell them that was sin and they had to rebuke sin. There was jealousy and envy between the members and some of it dealt with spiritual gifts. The members didn't recognize that different means different.

They were kind of like us in that way. When you are growing up and you dress differently than everyone else, maybe in a way that wasn't as good as everyone else, different meant—mine is worse, theirs is better. Our sinful nature attacks us in two ways when there are differences between us. Either it builds up our sinful pride and says, "You are better than they are because your difference makes you better even when it comes to spiritual gifts," or it attacks us and says, "Your gift isn't as important." Satan wants you to believe that so that person that has the gift that you really want but you don't have it, they are really a jerk and they are arrogant and they are a loser because they lord it over you whether they do or not. At times that is what our sinful nature thinks.

So Paul had to remind them that they didn't grow up knowing God, but they did have the Spirit because the Spirit now enabled them to say, "Jesus is Lord." Now that they were living as Christians knowing that Christ had taken away their sins—he had washed them all away and heaven was open to them—now he says, "You have spiritual gifts and you have to start putting them to use and not use them as a source of bickering between yourselves." I don't care where you read in the Bible—you can read in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 where it talks about spiritual gifts, 1 Peter 4 where it talks about spiritual gifts, Ephesians 4 and 5 where it talks about spiritual gifts—you will never find described as a spiritual gift pettiness, bickering or infighting. A lot of times, because we see differences among us, we would like to think that being petty and bickering and infighting is how we are serving the God who has saved us. But in reality we are undercutting his gospel and giving a horrible witness to the world when all we can ever find to do is complain and moan and be petty and pick at this and pick at that. Different means different—it doesn't mean better and worse.

So you have always wanted to have the gift of teaching and you don't have it and someone else does. The sinful nature wants you to be envious. The Holy Spirit wants you to thank God that God gives those gifts. Your spiritual gift is showing mercy and encouraging. You are wonderful at doing that but you think it's not all that important. Well, if I'm hurting, if I'm low, if I want to give up and throw in the towel and say, "You know what? I am going to go hand out carts at Wal-Mart because that looks a lot more

enjoyable than what I am doing right now being a pastor,” and you have that gift of showing mercy and encouraging and you aren’t using it—it becomes pretty important, doesn’t it, if you are not using it to benefit me at that point when I am low. Different means different. God gives different gifts because all gifts are necessary. We don’t need to get caught up in ranking them or being petty about them, but we need to recognize that God has given us gifts and he wants us to use them and they are all vitally important so that we work within the body of Christ.

If Satan gets us to think that different means “mine are worse so I don’t need to use them,” then he is winning. The church of God among us will limp. It will drag one leg behind as though it were injured because in reality, we will be injured.

Remember different means different. Whatever gift God has given you—I don’t care what it is—search Scriptures and find out what they are and put it into use. As you put it into use, you reveal God’s glory.

You might think to yourself, “I don’t have any spiritual gifts. There isn’t anything I can do to serve.” You have to remember what a spiritual gift is. A spiritual gift is something God gives to you when you are a Christian. When you come to faith in Jesus as your Savior, God equips you with gifts to serve within his kingdom. It’s not just natural inclinations or natural talent. It is something that God gives to you as a Christian. If you think you don’t have any, just glance back at what we read a little earlier from 1 Corinthians 12. If you look at that in your bulletin, what are you saying to God if you say, “I don’t have anything that I can do. I am not gifted.” Aren’t you calling God a liar? Didn’t God say, “*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*” (1 Corinthians 12:7). He gave to each one of us gifts to use. If we say there is nothing we can do, we are saying, “God, you messed up. You lied to me. You don’t know what you’re talking about.” I don’t care if your kid is in the grade school or if you are nearing the end of your time on this earth, God has given us all spiritual gifts and each one of us who is a Christian is the church of today. We can serve God. We can serve God joyfully. We can serve God thankfully. We can serve God by using the gifts he has given us. So figure out what they are. Look at those lists that I talked about. Read through them and then try things. If God seems to be blessing you, then maybe that is what the gift is that he has given you to use. But each one of these gifts is important because they reveal the glory of God.

In this room here, we are all a lot alike. We are all fairly similar, but in a lot of ways, we are really different, aren’t we? We are different in temperament. We are different in size and shape. We are different in personalities. We are different in a lot of different ways, but it is the same Spirit that gives each one of us these gifts. It is the same Spirit who washed away our sins at our baptism. It is the same Spirit that works through the Word to strengthen our faith. It is the same Spirit that comes to us through the wine and through the wafer to wash away our sins for all those times that we have thought different means better and worse; to wash away all those times that we haven’t been faithful with our spiritual gifts; to forgive us for all the times that we have been petty and nitpicking and not seeing the glory of God’s hand among us and instead seeing the things that we think we can complain about because we have been slighted.

God washes all that away. His glory is revealed in us as he forgives us for all of the foolish things that we have done that killed our Savior. He still loves us enough that he takes them all away and now that moves us to want to serve. It's not a "have to," not "someone has to do it," but "I get to." "I get to serve the God who loved me this much that he was perfect in my place, he died in my place, he gave me these gifts to use, he made me important in his kingdom, and he made me valuable in his kingdom." That is each and every Christian here today—vital to the work of the kingdom.

As we use those gifts joyfully, freely, overflowing with joy as we talked about in Bible study this morning, we reveal God's glory and people will want to know why you do what you do. Then we can say, "Let me tell you about my Savior and what he has done for me. That is why I do what I do. That is why I am what I am and that is why I rejoice even when I still screw up because I know that he has taken away my sins."

Our God has enabled you and me to say, "Jesus is Lord." Jesus is Lord means we live also for him in all that we think, say and do because we have a gracious, heavenly Father that we want to imitate and reveal.