



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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

January 28, 2007

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 78

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13

Gospel: Luke 4:20-32

### **Christ is Revealed Through You**

Some of you here this morning have had an organ transplant and some of you have had loved ones or know of people that have had an organ transplant. Once upon a time, an organ transplant wasn't as common a thing as it is now. In fact, when they first started testing some of the procedures and doing some of these things or things like an artificial heart, they had all kinds of problems and there were those that died as a result of the surgeries.

After the surgeries were performed successfully, what would you think if you went and visited someone and it went well and they said to you, "There must be something special about me that I am able to overcome and come through this entire surgery fine? Everything went well for me and those other people must not have been as good as I am, because they died." Wouldn't you think that person would more likely be saying, "Isn't this wonderful? Isn't this wonderful that this has happened? Isn't this wonderful that the doctors were able to do this?" Wouldn't they be talking about some of the people that gave them this gift of the organ or of the surgery and not just talking about themselves?

That would sound silly to us, wouldn't it? That would sound out of place. It would grate on our ears, I think, and yet over the last couple of weeks as we have been looking at spiritual gifts, that is what we have found out the Corinthians were doing and that at times, maybe we ourselves do with our spiritual gifts. We use our gifts. We serve in God's kingdom and then we say, "Look at me! Look at what I can do for God." Instead of remembering that our spiritual gifts are given to us so that they reveal God and show God's glory as we live to serve him. The Corinthians had a real problem with that. "My gift is better than your gift"—the kind of stuff that you hear out on the playground behind me. You can almost picture them sticking their tongues out at each other too after they say, "My gift is better than your gift."

As we have been looking at it over the past couple of weeks, hopefully we have seen that we are kind of that way too. We need to remember that the gifts God gives us, because we are a Christian—when we are a Christian, he gives us these spiritual gifts. He gives us a list of what they are in 1 Corinthians 12 and in Romans 12. He talks about them in Ephesians 4 and how they are to be used and in 1 Peter 4. But these are things that he gives to each and every Christian. He says to us, "you are the body of Christ and each one of you belongs to all the others" and each one has gifts exactly as God has apportioned it. So he is the one who has given us whatever gift we have. He is the one that wants us to use it to reveal his glory to make known among the nations

the things that he has done. So our goal, as Christians who have been forgiven by God and who love God, is to reveal Christ as we use our gifts; and especially and primarily, and maybe at times the only way we reveal Christ is when we actually use our gifts in love—which is what he reminds us today.

The Corinthian congregation, as we talked about the last couple of weeks, had problems. They had incest they were viewing as Christian freedom which Paul had to write and correct. They had all the clicks that were digging and picking at each other and fighting with each other. They viewed that as somehow they were better than others. He also tells us that they excelled in all gifts. God had blessed them abundantly with spiritual gifts when he brought these people to faith. The problem was that they were using them almost as a competition to say, “My gift is better than yours.” In 1 Corinthians 14, after what we just read, he goes on to talk at length about prophesying in tongues. Evidently in Corinth they were saying, “I speak in tongues. That means I am a better Christian than you are because your gift is only serving with your hands and anybody can do that.” Then Paul says to them, “I would rather say five intelligent words than a thousand in tongues if there is no one there to interpret because it doesn’t benefit anyone else. So desire the gifts that serve and benefit one another.”

Above all, he tells us throughout 1 Corinthians 12, it doesn’t really matter whatever gift you have because it is God who gave it to you, and it is God who wants you to use it, because you are the body of Christ. The body has to function together like we looked at last week. The head can’t say, “I don’t need the hands.” The hands can’t say, “I don’t need the feet.” All those kinds of things—the body has to work together as a unit. Likewise we, the members of this congregation, are a unit that God has put together so that we can be the body of Christ here where we are, and he has given us all the gifts we need to do it well and to succeed.

He reminds us that we need to use those gifts and put them into practice. We need to discover them. We need to use them, and we need to serve God. We need to do this. God wants us to do this. You and I need to do it—not so that we will get to heaven; we need to do it because he has already given us heaven through the life and death of Christ, and this is how we say “Thank you.” This is how we gush and we tell everyone what a wonderful God we have and what he has done for us, just like we would talk about what a wonderful surgeon we have and how they did this for us and now things are better than ever and “I can’t believe how good I feel.” As we use our gifts, that is what we do. We reveal Christ.

The fact of the matter is, we are always revealing Christ, aren’t we? If we come into contact with someone and they know that you are a Christian, you are revealing Christ to them. What they might know of Christ is what they see in you. Now, think about that for a minute. Does that scare you? If you have people that you know in your daily life that are going to hell because they don’t believe in Jesus and the only thing they would know about Christ is what they have seen in you, does that scare you? It scares me to death. Do I really want people that don’t know Christ to think God must be an overweight smart aleck? That is probably what they see in me though, right?

But, hopefully they see more than that, and hopefully as people get to know you, they will see more than that also in you. Hopefully they will see that you use whatever gifts God has given you to serve.

So how do we do that? How are we to serve? How are we to use our gifts? Whatever they are, he tells us to put them into practice. But now put them into practice by not comparing them to someone else. It is not, “My gift is better than your gift.” It is not, “Your gift is unimportant,” or “My gift is worthless and your gift is so important.” Either direction is wrong. He says to use whatever gift you have been given for the common good and use it in love. He says that if you are using your gifts and serving your God and you aren’t doing it in love, if you are doing it just to be recognized or just to be acknowledged, you are a loud noise, right?—a clanging cymbal, a loud gong. That is all you are. If you have knowledge and can explain Scripture better than anyone that you have ever met but you don’t do it out of love for God, you are nothing. You are a zero. God is saying that you are useless because you are not doing the right thing for the right reasons.

Isn’t it kind of interesting that these familiar words about love—you have probably all heard these words about love, right? *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails* (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). You have probably heard that over and over, but usually always in the setting of a wedding, right? But isn’t it fascinating to see that God inspired Paul to write these words, not in the setting of me and my wife where it certainly fits, but he used it in the setting of me and you—the believers, the body of Christ. We have a responsibility to use our gifts this way, by being patient, by being kind, by not being proud, by not being rude, by not being self-seeking, by not being easily angered, and by keeping no record of wrongs. That is how he wants us to interact as the body of Christ within a congregation.

Now tell me—are you feeling a little scared? Have you noticed that there are times that you keep a record of wrongs against your fellow congregation members? Are there times when you have not been patient with others as you expect them to be patient with you? Are there times when you are easily angered? Are there times when you don’t always protect, always trust, always hope and always persevere in your dealings with your fellow believers? I am guessing the answer is “yes.” I am guessing that there are times when you and I get petty and hold petty little grudges and hold our breath and pout and stomp our feet like we are back in preschool, because we don’t like how things go, so we are going to just complain, and we think that is our right. God tells us our right is to use our gifts in love.

Whatever your gift is—if your gift is being able to teach, if your gift is showing mercy, if your gift is encouraging, if your gift is serving with your hands, if your gift is leadership, if your gift is administration—whatever gifts God has given you, reread that paragraph. Put your name in there or say to yourself, “When I use my gift of showing mercy, I am patient. When I use my gift of showing mercy, I am kind. When I use my gift of showing

mercy, I don't envy." Or just put your own name in there—"Randy is patient. Randy is kind." You know, I'm surprised my family hasn't stopped me yet. We fall short.

So now, read the paragraph again. Only this time, don't put in your name or your spouse's name or the friend's name that you are mad at. This time, put in Jesus' name. Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind. Jesus is not easily angered. Jesus keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus always helps. Jesus always perseveres. Jesus never fails.

Now you see where our confidence is, don't you? Christ lived in our place. Christ died in our place. The things that scare us where we have fallen short in using our gifts, the things that scare us and frighten us because God hates, absolutely hates some of the things that you and I have done to one another—Jesus lived perfectly in our place and he died in our place to take away those sins. That is an absolute truth that can never, ever fail us.

When we recognize this absolute truth, we are forgiven, even though we are fools, and that moves us to want to use our gifts. Our faith increases as we see what God has done and we now want to do that. We long to get to the Lord's Supper and know that those sins are taken away, and then we long to walk back and say, "Lord, help me to serve you better. Lord help me to love you more fully. Lord help me to be more patient. Help me to be more kind. Help me to be the piece of the body of Christ, here in Morrison, that you want me to be."

Then as we all use our gifts, we can do more than we could ever think, because God will be at work among us. God will be the one achieving greatness among us and seeing that his kingdom grows, his name is hallowed and these other things. That is our purpose. But that comes as, out of love, we love him who first loved us.