

## Sermon Draft

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1–11

Sermon: “The Holy Spirit at Work”

We often hear about the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, yet may wonder, “What does he really do? What does he help us achieve?” We all know about Pentecost and how the Holy Spirit rested on all gathered that day. Our Epistle this morning, 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, begins with the sentence **“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be *uninformed*”** (v 1). Here we find one of the many texts in which Paul explains how empowered the Church is by the Holy Spirit without whom we truly are helpless.

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in John 14, **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”** And **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”**

So, the Holy Spirit not only brings us the gift of our faith but keeps us in it as our guide

1 Corinthians 12:1 does not literally speak of spiritual “gifts,” but simply states that Paul is informing us of “spiritual things,” that is, the work of the Spirit in everyday Christian life. Paul is informing the Christians in Corinth about the amazing usefulness of what they have been given, through their Baptism, in the divine person of the Holy Spirit.

Looking at verses 4–6, we find the work of the Holy Spirit rather broadly described as gifts, services, and activities. Beyond sharing the same origin, what these all have in common is that all are the work of the Divine but are miraculously accomplished through fragile human hands and miraculously proclaimed through imperfect human speech.

This is how the child of faith thrives from day to day, loving and serving the neighbor. Whether utterances of wisdom or knowledge, or the healing of body or mind, or the translation of foreign language, whether astonishing or mundane in form or appearance, this is the work of the Holy Spirit in the daily life of the Christian believer.

This is how we love our neighbor. This is the Christian vocation. Luther summarizes this in his commentary on Genesis: **“We all have one and the same God, and we are one in the unified worship of God, even if our works and vocations are different. But each one should do his duty in his station, even as Jacob is a saintly and spiritual man meditating on God’s Law, praying, administering and governing the church. In the meantime, however, he does not overlook lowly domestic duties connected with the fields and the flocks, and this is set before us as an example that we may know that all our actions in domestic life are pleasing to God and that they are necessary for this life in which it becomes each one to serve the one God and Lord of all according to one’s ability and vocation”** (AE 6:348).

Vocations are the everyday services, activities, and words of us Christians expressed through our daily interactions with our neighbors and given as gifts from God. Peter in his first letter writes, ***“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified***

***through Jesus Christ***” (1 Peter 4:10–11).

Sometimes our vocations seem very “spiritual” in nature from a human viewpoint, such as evangelism, church work, or caring for the poor, but other vocations may not appear to have any spiritual connection whatsoever. Some vocational tasks are hard to see as spiritual, such as the person repairing our car, the attorney in the courtroom, the parents getting completely exasperated with their teenager for not ending video games when it’s 10 p.m. on a school night.

The truth is that the Holy Spirit is at work through all human actions and words, however mundane or majestic they appear to our finite eyes. All of these services, words, and activities, assuming they do not violate the Word of God, are part of the Holy Spirit’s work toward our neighbor proclaiming, ***“Jesus is Lord”*** (v 3).

Unfortunately, Satan likes to deceive the human heart whenever possible and will take advantage of every opportunity to focus our hearts and minds on the spirit of “me” rather than the Spirit of God. In our text, Paul reminds us of what true “spiritual things” look like as opposed to empty, human effort.

In several places within 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, Paul reminds us that the work of the Spirit is always relational and is never reductive or individualistic. In recent church history, many have struggled with the concept of “spiritual gifts,” primarily because of an improper emphasis on individual identity and personal attention.

The temptation to be a “God-like” individual has been biting at our heels from the very beginning. According to our current text, and the rest of the New Testament, truly “spiritual” gifts are not reductive, that is, a singular focus on a particular individual’s ability, but they are instead relational, one part of a larger whole. ***“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”*** (v 7).

We see this communicated through the relational comparisons of “varieties but one” in verse 5 or “to each but common” in verse 7 and “individually but one” in verse 11. The mention in verses 4–6 of the Spirit, Lord, and God, while not literally using the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, should at least remind us of the distinctly three, but fully one, relational nature of God in the Trinity.

We are also told that, from the beginning, the relational nature of God as Trinity was reflected in his creation. The first human being was incomplete while alone. We were created in and for relationship with God and one another, originally from the dust and, later, as new creations through Baptism, together becoming the Body of the Church. ***“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another”*** (Romans 12:4–5).

The day-to-day work of the Holy Spirit through our human hands is not an individual effort; it is each of us playing one part of a much greater whole. When we reduce the work of the Holy Spirit to the individual alone, we are destined for disappointment.

This morning’s Epistle makes it clear that we play the part, but the Spirit provides the power. Take a look at verses 6 and 11: ***“It is the same God who empowers them all in everyone,” and “all these are empowered by one and the same Spirit.”***

While it is true that your services, your activities, and your words are “yours,” we must never forget that the power which accomplishes anything through them is fully the Lord’s. Verse 3 tells us that even our ability to proclaim **“Jesus is Lord”** is the work of the Holy Spirit as the Word creates faith. ***Therefore, when we have been justified by faith and regenerated, we begin to fear and love God, to pray to Him, to expect aid from Him, to give thanks and praise Him, and to obey Him in times of suffering. We also begin to love our neighbors, because our hearts have spiritual and holy movements.*** (Ap V 4)

In distinction, verse 2 speaks of those who are being led to serve dead idols and empty outcomes with the description “however you were led,” that is, by something other than the Holy Spirit. Whether it is desire, anger, envy, or some other emotional drive, human power only produces dead work. If it is spiritual work, it must be spiritually powered.

If our work is truly of the Holy Spirit, powered by him and not ourselves, the ultimate outcome will reflect the source, that **“Jesus is Lord.”** Thus the words of this morning’s Old Testament Reading:

***“The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory”***

(Isaiah 62:2).

Do not be uninformed. The Holy Spirit is at work in all of us who believe; we are helpless without him. But with him, serving together as the Body of Christ, we shall see the world made new in Christ. We shall see marvelous things, both now and for eternity. In the name of Jesus.

Amen