

## **The Holy Spirit: Pentecost, Christ's Body and Luka Modric**

This morning is Pentecost, a day where we celebrate the LORD's outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all believers, all the time. I will admit that sharing about the Holy Spirit is something that confuses me a lot of the time. Mostly because when I read of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, I am left wondering "Where are my superpowers?" In Acts 19, Paul's handkerchiefs, and other fabrics that he had touched were sent around the area, and sick people were healed upon touching them. I don't think anybody is passing around my used kleenexes, hoping to be healed. I don't think I am alone when I say that I feel a disconnect between the power of the Holy Spirit in "bible times" versus currently. I have been a part of many a retreat, where we are sent off to hear the voice of God, and while others would return with profound thoughts and revelations, I was often just left frustrated at my inability to focus. What does it mean for us believers who do not seem to experience the Holy Spirit as dramatically as the Early Church, or even as intensely as the other believers around us. Are we lacking faith? Does the Holy Spirit not work through us like that? Is everyone who does experience the Holy Spirit like that in a state of mass psychosis? These are questions that unfortunately haunt me, and maybe you are in the same boat. I almost never have solid answers to big questions, and this morning is no exception. I do think that the text we have today can give us a hopeful path moving forward that does not negate our faith, or diminish the experience of others to nothing.

Our text in Corinthians this morning talks about the body of Christ, which is all of us. Each person is individually given different gifts. The gifts mentioned here are wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, healing, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and discernment of spirits. Gifts like wisdom and knowledge, are gifts that I see everyday in the people around me. In youth we have been talking about the Prophets, and about how they are not so much fortune tellers, but moreso, truth tellers. This is also something I see very often in life. While speaking in tongues, healing, and interpreting tongues are not gifts I see in my day to day life, I think it is important to remind ourselves that a lot of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are things that we might call character strengths or simply personalities.

Reading through this list of gifts, and hearing Paul talk about how they all come from God, I think my previous complaint about not having superpowers comes from a place of jealousy at times. How much easier would it be to believe in God if I saw people healed before my eyes. While Paul makes no claim about which of these gifts are the best (or coolest) I think we often want to elevate some of these gifts over the other. Possibly because we like to see results, we like things to be conclusive. If you are like me, and often feel confused by the concept of the Holy Spirit, I would encourage you to try and see that Spirit in the people around you who are wise, knowledgeable and discerning, not just in those who are able to heal the masses. Obvious and visible does not mean better.

This brings us to someone that inspires me- Luka Modric. Luka Modric is a Croatian soccer player, who has competed at some of the highest levels. Born in Croatia, during the war of independence, Luka Modric had a tough childhood. His grandfather was executed by rebels, and his family home was burned to the ground at a young age. Luka grew up as a refugee, fleeing from the effects of war, and began playing soccer to escape his difficult reality. In 2018, Luka Modric led Croatia to a second place finish at the world cup, and was voted the best player on the planet later in that year. Luka Modric is not particularly fast, he is only 5 ft 8, and you will rarely see him keep the ball in his possession for more than a few seconds, before passing it to a teammate. If you and I were to sit down and watch Luka Modric play for Real Madrid, and I told you to look for the best player on the field, I can almost guarantee you would not be able to figure out which player he is. Obvious does not always mean better, and it takes all kinds of players to make a soccer team. Just like how it takes all kinds of people to form the body of Christ. A variety of gifts and understandings is what makes the community of Christ special. Unlike soccer we do not vote for a "Christian of the year award", but the lesson remains that different gifts, visible or modest, deserve to be celebrated.

This is the issue Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 12. The actual purpose of Paul writing this letter to the Corinthians was because they were

making various divisions between one another, and it was making people feel “worse than” or “better than”. We find that one of these divides took place over the Lord’s Supper, where those who were richer and did not have to work as late, were eating all of the food before those of a lower social class could arrive. It appears the same sort of division was happening regarding the Spiritual Gifts people were receiving. People assumed that the gifts had something to do with their economic status, worthiness, or faithfulness. Paul is saying that this is not the case. Simply put we are all different and bring different gifts to the table and that is a good thing. No gift is to be seen as greater than another, and no person is to be seen as greater. While I might wish I had some of the gifts that I see as more obvious, Paul makes it clear that God does not view different gifts as greater or worse than one another.

So, if you are at all like me, and you struggle with the concept of the Holy Spirit, and often feel lost or inadequate when it comes to talking about the Holy Spirit, take comfort knowing that every gift is seen as equal, and is equally important to the mission of the church. We all bring something different to the table, and these texts about the gifts of the Spirit are never meant to discourage us, or to call into question the validity of our faith. These texts about spiritual gifts are meant to do the very opposite and encourage us that we are all equal, and while we may not always understand the Holy Spirit, this myriad of relationships with the Holy Spirit is what makes us a vibrant faith community. We do not have the same gifts, we do not have the same understanding, and we do not have the same relationship with the Holy Spirit and that is a good thing.

This morning we welcome a new member into our church. Someone who brings their own set of gifts, passions and understandings. The reason membership is exciting is because we are formally welcoming another unique being into our church. While historically, differences can lead to tension, the Good News of Jesus empowers us to not simply overcome the ways we are different, but utilize these differences to be active in the world.

Jesus set the standard for not letting our differences divide us, but rather strengthen us, in the disciples he chose. Jesus is the Son of God, and he could have easily selected 12 like minded people, who all got along

to help him carry out his mission. Jesus did not do that. Even if we just look at three disciples, like Peter, Simon the Zealot, and Matthew the tax collector, we will find a lot of differences. Peter seemed to be a rather typical blue collar Galilean, like Jesus. He was a fisherman, who likely received similar education regarding Torah and religion as Jesus. Simon the Zealot, while from the same faith tradition, had a very different perspective regarding his role in the world. A Zealot, was essentially a revolutionary, whose hope was to see the Roman Empire overthrown, even if it required violence. Matthew the tax collector, would have been viewed as a traitor to his own people, sympathizing with the Roman Empire that ruled over him. Simon was a bit too radical for Peter. Matthew's job would have upset Peter. Matthew feared Simon, as it was not uncommon for Zealots to murder those who were sympathetic to the Roman Empire. Jesus did not select this unique group just so they could overcome their differences. Jesus selected this diverse group, because Jesus knew they each brought something valuable to the table. Maybe Peter brought a down to earth perspective, Simon brought a passion for change, and Matthew brought sympathy for their enemies.

As we celebrate Pentecost, and new membership, let us remember that the joy of the Holy Spirit is that it affects us all in different, hard to explain ways. We all bring something different to this church, and that is a wonderful, beautiful and great thing.

Preparation for Pentecost Communion - Luke

L: As John baptized Jesus in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit baptized the body of Christ. God now gathers us at this table as the body of Christ to hear the voice of heaven, spoken over the waters of baptism, saying, "You are my beloved."

**P: Water, bread and wine, the gifts of the earth, the gifts of the church, reveal that we belong with God and one another.**

L: Come with your hunger. Come with your thirst.

**All: This is Christ's table. This is our feast. Come, Holy Spirit!**