

The Day of Pentecost
1 Corinthians 12:3-13

An atheist was walking through the woods on a hike.
When he was several miles deep into the woods he saw a bear.
And the big brown bear saw him.

The bear began to chase him and while the man was running for his life
he fell to the ground.
The fierce looking bear stood over him with a snarling mouth
and deadly claws ready to maul his victim.
The atheist was at the bear's mercy.

Suddenly, time froze.
God intervened and asked the man if he should help him
even though the man had denied God's existence all his life.
The man replied,
"It would be hypocritical of me to ask you to treat me as a Christian,
but maybe you could make the bear a Christian?"

Miraculously, the bear lowered its paws and began to pray.
"Lord, bless this food, which I am about to receive."

The bear actually resembled a Christian from outward appearance didn't he?
God intervened in its life and gave it the great gift of knowing
who to pray to and what to pray.

The bear was about to eat a meal and said the right words
at the right time, giving thanks to God for the food
it was about to receive.

But, his actions were self-serving.
not in line with actually *being* a Christian.
His gain would be at the atheist's expense.

About two thousand years ago the apostle Paul wrote a letter
to a church he founded in the city of Corinth.
Like the bear, many people in the Corinthian church had received
through the Holy Spirit the gift of knowing God.

Like the bear, the Corinthians were using the gifts they had received from God as their own possession, for their own benefit, instead of glorifying God in the power of the Spirit to build up the Body of Christ.

They were strutting around flaunting their spiritual gifts like peacocks showing off their feathers.

There was sexual immorality, legal battles among believers, and dissensions over leadership.

So, Paul told them:

“There are a varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

Paul reminded them that they all had received living water from the same fountain.

He said there's only one thing for a Christian to boast about – the cross of Christ who died for all of them while they were yet sinners.

Every person is a spiritual being.

The breath of the spirit animates human beings.

I became aware of that for the first time when I did a chaplaincy at a hospital one summer.

I walked into a room to be with the wife of a young man who had just died.

It was the first time I had ever seen a corpse.

It occurred to me as I looked at him that the life force, the animating spirit of God, had left his body.

Medical technology is advancing at an incredible rate.

But the spirit, the life force, the power that animates us is from God alone.

Power can be used in two ways: it can be unleashed or it can be harnessed.

The energy in ten gallons of gasoline, for example, can be released as an explosion by lighting a match and dropping it into the can of gasoline.

Or the same ten gallons can be channeled through a car engine
in a controlled burn and used to transport a person 350 miles.
Explosions are spectacular but controlled burns have lasting effect
and staying power.

The Holy Spirit works both ways.
At Pentecost, he exploded on the scene,
his presence was like tongues of fire.
Thousands were affected by one burst of God's power.

But, he also works through the church – the body of believers
God chose to tap the Holy Spirit's power for the long haul.

Through worship, prayer, Scripture, fellowship and service,
we are provided with the staying power we need to be the church
the body of Christ to one another and in the world.

The Holy Spirit is a gentleman and will not go where
he is not invited or welcomed.
A church that does not invite the Holy Spirit into its life will dry up
and wither on the vine.

The Holy Spirit is the power of God unleashed and will not be controlled
or manipulated or compromised.

In earlier times, God chose special people and special places to grace people
with a visitation of the Holy Spirit.
At Pentecost God poured out his Holy Spirit so that the life of his Son,
Jesus Christ, could be given to the church, his Body on earth.

What is amazing is that a holy God chose unholy vessels like you and me
to make His home with.

We are fixated in our culture with the human body.
If you don't believe me, take a look at the cover of the magazines that line
the check-out stand the next time you are in Publix or Bi-Lo,
the infomercials for fitness equipment,
the surgeries to enhance or reduce parts of the anatomy
the drugs to grow hair on bald men's heads.

They all add up to the message that a perfect looking outward appearance is the key to happiness and success.

God gives us a different picture of a perfect looking body.
The fullness of God housed in the ordinary body of a man named Jesus.

He used his God given feet to bring the Good News.
He used his God given hands to bless and heal and feed.
He used his eyes to look into the face and soul of each person
in truth and compassion.
He used his mouth to preach and teach the Word of God.

The most beautiful body in the world was the beaten and crucified body
of Jesus that revealed the fullness of God's love
on the Cross of Calvary.

And now he says to us just like he said to the twelve he chose
and everyone single Christian since then:

“You be my body in the world.
Go out and be the body of Christ – individually and as the church.
Let my body which was broken for the world be a body of beauty
and grace and truth to a broken world.”

On our own this would be impossible and foolish to even attempt.
But with God, all things are possible.
Because he has given us the great gift of the Holy Spirit.

A member of our church, Jack Jackson, became ill over the weekend.
He called another member of the church to take him to the doctor.
He ended up needing surgery.

I was called and went to the hospital and relieved the friend who had been
with him all day.

That night three other members of the church came to the waiting room to
relieve me and they stayed until he was out of recovery
because they didn't want him waking up in a hospital room alone.

The doctor came out and when he saw them, and they explained who they were, he said, “Wow. What church do you go to?”

I'll take that body over any supermodel's body any day.
How beautiful is the Body of Christ.