

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 7, 2010

Sermon Text: I Corinthians 14:12 (Series C)

“So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.”

Sermon Title: “Sinners Served and Gifted to Serve”

Sermon Prayer: Motivated by Jesus' love, may we use all we've given for His purpose: to build up members of His flock.

Sermon Hymn: *Not for Tongues of Heaven's Angels* [LSB 695]

Sermon Outline:

- I. Jesus' life and service was for you.
- II. He has served us.
- III. He has gifted us.
- IV. Gifts to build up, not to show off.
- V. Jesus' love is our motivation.

God's grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Please repeat after me: [blah nah nah nah nah nah, malanah, lanah, lanah, bur rah, ha, ha, ha]. Try it with me. Now what I want you to do, turn to someone near you and and let's all say it at once.

No this isn't something of the Bible's original languages I learned years ago. Sure you want to know what “blah nah nah nah nah nah, malanah, lanah, lanah, bur rah, ha, ha, ha” means, right?Actually, I don't know, but it sure wakes you up. And, it sure looks and sounds funny from where I'm standing up here. We'll get back to this later.

Ephesians 2:10 reads, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* Created in Christ Jesus for good works. What does this mean and what good works is this verse talking about? We're going to use our Epistle reading to answer this.

This Epistle reading we have for this Sunday, written by Paul to the Christians in Corinth is in continuation of the past two Sundays. We remember a couple of Sundays ago Paul was using the analogy of the parts of the human body, how they all work together for a single purpose, and how they do despise or covet one another's abilities, to describe how each of us have been given certain abilities for work in the Kingdom of God and we are not jealous or

despising of one another's ability because we work together for a single purpose, and that is the purpose God has given us the body of Christ. That was chapter 12 of I Corinthians.

In chapter 13, Paul reminds us what it is that motivates us to work together, to use the gifts and abilities God's given us, for that single purpose God has given us. It is love. Not just any love, but the love of Jesus, the love Jesus has for all mankind, that led Him to go through all the excruciating, horrible, emotional, physical, and spiritual pain and suffering He went through and the humiliating, agonizing death He experienced on the Cross.

It's all good to remind ourselves, Jesus didn't just give a part of His life, but He gave up everything. His life was all about freeing us from the eternal punishment and condemnation we deserve and winning for us eternal life in paradise. His life was all about taking upon His shoulders the guilt of His own enemies and bearing the consequence that really was ours. So, we could be declared sinless, righteous, in God's eyes and belong to Him in His Kingdom. Dying for those who love you is one thing, dying for your enemies is something extraordinary, that's what God calls love- Jesus' love for each of us.

To use the analogy Paul used concerning the human body. Every part of Jesus' body knew well and was completely dedicated in fulfilling what Jesus had been sent to fulfill- our salvation. He came to serve. All He did He did with you and me on His mind and in His heart.

Friends, we may certainly rejoice, because we have been served. Served in a magnificent and extraordinary way. And, now as Ephesians 2:10 reads, we have been created in Christ Jesus, we are God's workmanship. Created, designed (purchased with Jesus' blood) for good works. Something extraordinary has happened to us.

Going back to our Epistle reading for this Sunday, Paul addresses the Christians in Corinth concerning the gift some or many of them had, the gift of speaking in tongues. What exactly was this gift of tongues? It was the ability to speak in a language which was not a speaker's native tongue. On Pentecost, of remember of course, the Spirit empowered the apostles to speak in languages which were known earthly languages. It was a gift to be used to spread the Gospel around the world. Languages understood by the Egyptians, the Romans, etc.

But there in Corinth, what languages, tongues, were they speaking? Were they earthly languages others around the world, or right there, knew? Or were they languages known only to God? We do not know for sure, actually. But, as Paul indicated clearly in this chapter when

the tongue speakers spoke in tongues, no one else, could ever understand them.

Now, this gift of speaking in tongues, Paul does not ridicule it. He knew well, that if it was, indeed, a gift from God, it was a gift of the Holy Spirit. In fact, He himself spoke in tongues and was thankful for that gift from God. But, what Paul is making very clear to those in Corinth, and to us, this gift wasn't that important. It wasn't important for one reason, and a important reason, it did not build up the church. If no one could understand the tongue, no one could be built up in Christian faith and life. As Paul stated, and we read in verse 16, *“if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?”*

Just as he stated in the beginning of this discussion, in verse 12, *“since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.”* There is the very purpose God has given the body of His Son Jesus Christ. To make disciples of all nations, by baptizing and teaching, as Jesus stated it clearly- to build each other up in faith and in the love of Jesus Christ. What motivates us to use the gifts God's given us? Love, not just any simple love, but the love Jesus revealed to the world when He served all of us by giving up His life. An extraordinary love, never thinking of itself, but only of the eternal well-being of others. That's what was on Jesus' mind and in His heart all of His life.

Oh, yes, He served us in an extraordinary way. In a way the world would never think of, nor can it comprehend or understand without the work of the Holy Spirit. But, we, each one of us, we are the body of Christ, purchased and made alive in His blood, made alive to know what it is He has done for us and why. So, now, created in Him, we are created for good works. Good works- which have everything to do with the love Jesus had for others, everything to do with His desire that all others be granted eternal rest and peace in the Paradise of Heaven.

So, God has gifted each of us. Gifted in such a way that our gifts work perfectly and in harmony with the gifts others have for the single purpose God has given us, the body of Christ, to go and make disciples of all nations. Starting here, building each other up, and pressing on out into the community, the state, and the world. Gifted to serve Him who served us with His life- that's who we've been made to be in Jesus' blood.

Shortly before Jesus was betrayed and arrested He was speaking with His disciples. He was teaching them about His purpose and reason for being sent by God the Father. How the

Holy Spirit would enlighten their hearts to these things, to His love for everyone, and would prompt them to teach others. That's recorded in John, chapter 16. Chapter 17 of John starts out with Jesus' prayer:

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.’”

What does Jesus mean when He asked His Father to glorify Him so that He glorify His Father? The glory Jesus is speaking of is the same glory of God spoken of all throughout Scripture. It's no different. The glory of the God lifted high on a Cross. The glory of the ultimate servant, the ultimate sacrifice. The glory of the Lamb of God, sent to be sacrificed. Jesus' glory, and the glory He gave His Father, had all to do with that fact that He did not think of Himself. He thought of those He had been sent to serve and save with His life. He gave glory to His Father in that He submitted entirely and completely to His Father's will for Him to suffer and die. And, such a servant as that, is who God glorifies and who gives God glory. True glory is all about the eternal salvation given to all by the sacrificed Lamb of God. Glory does not think of itself, but of the eternal well-being of others. This is the glory Scripture speaks from Genesis through to the Book of Revelation.

Friends, that is how we bring glory to our Lord. By bringing the love of Jesus, the love He revealed on the Cross, to others, so they too may be comforted by His message of hope. He has given us His love to do this. He has given us gifts to do this. Since, then, just as no one part of Jesus' body despised or coveted another part of His body in fulfilling all He had been sent to do, neither do we look to others and their gifts and covet, or....show off. But, our number one priority in life is to build each other up in faith in Jesus Christ and bring the love of Jesus to others.

We live our lives in service, with our hearts and minds set upon Jesus Christ.

No, Paul did not ridicule those who had the gift of speaking in tongues. Nor, did he ridicule the gift in itself. He only raised the point, what purpose or good is it if it does not bring

the love of Jesus Christ to others? As Paul stated, “strive to excel in building up the church”. Because that is love, the love of Jesus Christ.

Remember, “blah nah nah nah nah nah, malanah, lanah, lanah, bur rah, ha, ha, ha”. Let's just say that's the way any of us gives praise, honor, and glory to our Lord. If,...if that is a gift of the Holy Spirit, well then that is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but may we all ask ourselves and everyone else what Paul asked, “*how can anyone in position of an outsider say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving when he does not know what your are saying?*”

Bringing the message to others in a way they can understand, what a beautiful and joyful service to our Lord. It's simple and easy. Let's try. I would like for you to turn to the same person you turned to earlier. And, let's share the message with them in a way they can understand. Go ahead and say with me, “Our Lord's love for you is great.--- He loved you by giving His life for you--- so you may have eternal life with Him.--- It's His Promise to you!”

May we speak loud and clear, sing if so desired the message of hope and comfort of Jesus Christ and His love. Not because we have to, but because we want to, because we so want others to know and be assured of His extraordinary love He has revealed to us as our servant, our servant upon the Cross. And, yes, His service upon that Cross covered all our sins, including the sins when we have used our gifts from God to glorify ourselves instead of Him.

May we all, joyfully, thankfully, and gladly use our gifts to direct and point, to bring and assure all others of the Promise of Jesus Christ. It brings our Lord great joy. And, because it brings our Lord great joy, our hearts rejoice also. Amen.