

Lent Devotional March 31, 2020

Scripture

1 Corinthians 14:20-33a, 39-40

20 Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults. 21 In the law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen to me," says the Lord. 22 Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. 25 After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, "God is really among you." 26 What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, 33 for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. . . . 39 So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; 40 but all things should be done decently and in order.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. Joseph D. Small '66, Academia (2008)

John Wimber, founder of the Pentecostal, new-paradigm Vineyard Churches, was a self-described "beer guzzling, drug abusing pop musician" before his conversion. As a new Christian, he became a voracious reader of the New Testament and began attending a church. One Sunday, following a sedate worship service, Wimber asked a church leader,

"When do we get to do the stuff?" . . . "What stuff?" the leader replied . . . "You know, the stuff in the Bible—like raising people from the dead, healing the blind and paralyzed." . . . "We don't do that anymore" . . . "You don't? What do you do?" . . . "What we did this morning." . . . Exasperated, Wimber sighed, "For that I gave up drugs?"

Most congregations in mainline denominations "don't do that anymore," and they have no desire to start. Pentecostal and charismatic churches are viewed as an alien zone, puzzling and mildly threatening.

For 12 years I was co-chair of the International Reformed-Pentecostal Dialogue. A personal result of the Dialogue is that I now read the New Testament differently. I am far more aware of the centrality of the Holy Spirit throughout the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles.

Today's reading is uncomfortable and challenging. Do we believe that the Holy Spirit's gifts include ecstatic utterance, healing, interpreting God's word, revealing God's purpose, and edifying the congregation? Or do we exclude some and domesticate others? Do we believe that all the Spirit's gifts are distributed throughout God's people and that every person is gifted by the Holy Spirit of God? Or do we restrict spiritual gifts to pastors? Does our worship honor the Spirit's gifts to all God's people, or do we only recognize some of the gifts given to some of God's people?

Prayer

Mighty God, every day you send your Holy Spirit to your people, thereby blessing us with spiritual gifts. Open our hearts to make us receptive disciples. Fill us with flaming desire to join our gifts together, thus building up the Church and serving the world for which Christ died. Amen.