

May 2024



From the VEEP

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” John 11: 25-26

On March 19, 2024 there was a terrible traffic accident in the Fairwood area south of Renton. It claimed the lives of four people, including three children. Two additional children were hospitalized, as was the driver who caused the accident. In the blink of an eye three families lost precious loved ones. This terrible tragedy impacted the small school community that I lead – as all those who died were part of our HOME Program family.

Any sudden, violent death is hard to comprehend, but when children are added to the mix it is even more difficult. As poet Emily Dickinson says, the loss is “So huge, so hopeless to conceive.” As an educator, one of my gifts is the ability to see my students not just for who they are now, but also to simultaneously envision who they might become. My job is to help them live into that future. As a community, then, we mourn not only the loss of the children they were, but also the adults they might have been and the lives they might have lived.

In the first few days after the accident, our art teacher provided an amazing project for her classes. The students took terracotta flowerpots and broke them apart. The teacher shared how we have experienced loss and can feel broken. Students were encouraged to paint the outside how they feel they appear to the world and the inside how they feel on the inside. Once the paint was dry, they reassembled their pots and planted seeds to grow a plant. Those pots will be tangible reminders that although the rebuilt pots are not the same as they were before they were broken, they can still be beautiful and fulfill their purpose of providing a place for new life to grow.

As we have processed this tremendous loss, we have been in awe of the families who were at the center of this. Their faith, their love, their forgiveness have been inspirational. Their faith traditions are not exactly mine, but they do believe that death is not the end and that Jesus is Lord. For me, I take comfort that the God I worship knows what it is to suffer and knows what it is to lose a beloved son. God doesn't prevent these tragedies, nor does God make the pain go away, but God walks with us in that pain. One of the parents said at one of the funerals that God doesn't give us more than we can handle, but for me the truth is there is quite a lot that I cannot handle on my own, but everything is possible for God. When my effort falls short, I know God can lift me up.

All of this loss occurred just before Holy Week this year and I must say that the walk from the cross to the empty tomb and the promise of the resurrection was particularly poignant. We are Easter people and I rejoice that it is so.

Here's what the Synod Council and/or I have been up to in April:

- Executive Committee: We met on April 10. Among other business, we finalized the budget to present to the Synod Assembly, approved a new policy for synod coaches, and authorized the Gloria Dei Endowment team to provide a sabbatical grant.
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Assessment: Our DEIB Assessment team held our first training on March 23 and the leadership team met to debrief and plan next steps on April 18.
- Preparing for Synod Assembly on May 18 – at Grace Lutheran Church in Des Moines

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From the Bishop:

I have a confession to make, I am a terrible pool player. I am so bad that the last time I played, the person I was playing with stopped the game and said, “You are the worst pool player I have ever played with.” (I had told him I was horrible but he didn’t believe me.) I’m using this story as a very thin tangent to talk about gifts and the Spirit ... bear with me.

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, we read, *“Now there are 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.”*

As many of you know, Paul was writing to a congregation in Corinth after receiving some correspondence from them and hearing their concerns. Throughout this letter Paul emphatically makes it clear that no one is spiritually better than others – no one has better faith, no one has better gifts, no one should eat better than another at the Eucharist table. Paul is adamant in this. (He is talking about this because of some struggles in the Corinth church. You are welcome to read the entire letter of 1 Corinthians to get more context.)

Paul emphasizes that because we all receive faith through the Holy Spirit, no one is spiritually superior. Paul further emphasizes that because we all receive a variety of gifts given by the Holy Spirit, no one has a worthier gift than another. And, to emphasize this point, Paul writes that the Spirit does not give only one kind of gift to all. Because the church and the world need diverse gifts, the Spirit gives different gifts to different people. In other words, Paul is simply saying this: same Spirit – lots of gifts.

You hear this? In a society where we emphasize certain gifts and skills and abilities above others (and often feel like we have fallen short), we hear in 1 Corinthians that the Holy Spirit gives a variety of gifts to a variety of people. Specifically, YOU have been given a variety of gifts, and this is good.

Further, these Holy Spirit gifts – they are not meant to benefit the individual person but are to benefit the entire community and world. Paul emphasizes that these gifts are not to be used in selfish ways or in self-seeking ways. Paul clearly states that if a gift cannot be shared, and shared for the good of others, it is not from the Spirit. Ultimately, the purpose of these different gifts of the Spirit is to share in God’s love and grace and mercy with all through Jesus Christ our Savior.

As Americans, we have often been told (and maybe believe) that as individuals we are responsible for ourselves. We are not to rely on others – we are to be strong and self-sufficient. We are taught that to have freedom is to be autonomous. But let’s be clear. This is far from what we read in 1 Corinthians. Paul says each person receives gifts for the common good. Paul says that each person receives the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. It is in community where the gifts from the Holy Spirit shine. It is in community where the Holy Spirit is made manifest.

You see, it is God’s intention that we are to be with one another – for one another – as the community of faith, as the body of Christ, as the Church on earth. The Holy Spirit has given a variety of gifts to a variety of congregations and individuals. And together we are called to bring these gifts together to help bear one another’s burdens, to love and pray together, to bring justice and new life, to be made manifest in the Holy Spirit for the common good.

Honestly, it doesn’t matter that I am a terrible pool player. But it does matter how I both share the gifts that God has given me and how I reach out to others in mutual support when I am in need.

I would love to hear stories from you about your gifts being made manifest in the Holy Spirit – individually and in your congregation. How are each person’s gifts being shared in your own particular congregation? How is your congregation sharing with another congregation? What gifts were missing from your particular place of worship that you have found outside of your space? What gifts have you been able to share with others?

May we live into what we often say in worship, “The gifts of God, for the people of God.” Amen.

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