

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, June 10, 2018**

**THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU (4)**

**1 Corinthians 12:4-11**

Last Sunday I introduced you to Charles Parham, Agnes Ozman, and William Seymour, and told you about the roles they played in the birth of the modern Pentecostal movement in Christianity, with its emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying gift of speaking in tongues (languages) not previously known by the speakers. Today I want to tell you about someone whose name may be more familiar to you, someone who was influenced in a major way by the Pentecostal movement.

Eugene Peterson, now in his 80s and living in retirement in Montana, is the author of more than 30 books, almost all of them on pastoral ministry. Born in Washington state and raised in Kalispell, Montana, Peterson went on to become the founding pastor of a Presbyterian church in Bel Air, Maryland, a church he served as pastor for 29 years before becoming a professor of spiritual theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. He is best known for his paraphrase of the Bible known as *The Message*, to which I refer almost every Sunday.

In his memoir, *The Pastor*, Peterson calls himself a “Presbycostal” – a combination of Presbyterian and Pentecostal. His religious roots in Montana were Pentecostal. He says: “I grew up Pentecostal. As an adult, I became a Presbyterian. I made the transition effortlessly.” His first “ministry” assignment as a seminary student in New York City was to coach a church basketball team – a task for which he was well-suited, having played basketball in college (at Seattle Pacific University) as well as high school. The church whose basketball team he coached was Presbyterian (Peterson, *The Pastor*, 213-215).

He was, he says, “a child of the first generation of Pentecostalism in America” (215). His father owned a butcher shop. His mother was a Pentecostal preacher. When Peterson was three or four years old, his mother began taking him with her on Sunday evenings to hold services in small, out-of-the-way settlements of miners and lumberjacks. She would lead singing and then preach. This went on until Eugene was six. It stopped, he says, because his mother gave birth to his sister, and now there was a baby to tend to. Nevertheless, because of these early memories, the influence of his mother, and the Pentecostal church they attended in Kalispell, Pentecostalism was part of Eugene’s spiritual DNA.

At one point, after graduating from college in the early 1950s, Eugene decided to become a pastor – mostly because he didn’t know what else to do. He writes: “I had never considered being a pastor. For me, being a pastor was what you did when you couldn’t do anything else, one step up the ladder from being unemployed... I wasn’t exactly qualified to be a pastor, but in the (Pentecostal) church culture in which I grew up it didn’t take much to qualify.” So, after talking it over with his parents, he contacted the head of their denomination in Montana to see if there were any churches looking for a pastor. There were none, but the head of the denomination told Eugene they wanted to start a new church in a town where they didn’t have

a church. He invited Eugene to give it a try. To which, because he didn't have any other prospects, Eugene agreed.

Arriving in the town, Eugene found a job (as a meat-cutter in a butcher shop) and a place to live (in a basement apartment). The next day, he says, he went through town knocking on doors and introducing himself: "Hello, I'm Eugene Peterson, and I've been asked by my denomination to come here to start an Assembly of God church. Can I talk to you about it?" For the next six hours, he says, he knocked on every door in town, and never got inside a single one. "Everyone in town," he discovered, "was either a Methodist or a Mormon. And apparently they all went to church" (81-82).

That was the end of his first attempt to start a new church. From there, however, God led him to seminary, where Pentecostal met Presbyterian and produced the hybrid he calls "Presbycostal."

We talked last Sunday about the core beliefs and emphases of Pentecostal Christianity, and how we differ in our understanding and interpretation of the Bible in some ways. We affirm, though, that our Pentecostal brothers and sisters are just that – they are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and Jesus loves them just the same and just as much as He loves us. Even though we have our differences, there is much we can learn from our Pentecostal sisters and brothers, including (maybe especially) their emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit in the everyday lives of everyday Christians. Eugene Peterson calls it "the Pentecostal zest." He says: "If I were to define what for me makes up the core Pentecostal identity, it is the lived conviction that everything, absolutely everything in the Scriptures is livable. Not just true, but livable. Not just an idea or a cause, but livable in real life. Everything that is revealed in Jesus and the Scriptures, the gospel, is there to be lived by ordinary Christians in ordinary times. This is the supernatural core, a lived resurrection and Holy Spirit core, of the Christian life" (214).

Do you believe that? Do you believe that what is recorded and revealed in the Bible is not just true but livable? Not just an idea or a cause, but actually livable – to be lived out in real life? To be lived by ordinary Christians in ordinary times, as well as the extra-ordinary times in which we live?

Do you believe that the Holy Spirit is more than a doctrine to which we give our assent? That the Holy Spirit is a real, living personal being, the third Person of the Trinity, who is to be known and experienced in *your* personal experience, in *your* spiritual life, in the ins-and-outs and ups-and-downs of *your* daily pilgrimage in this world?

Do you believe that? Do you? I do. I *want* to believe it. We Presbyterians are known historically for our emphasis on the importance of the life of the mind. We value education. We believe in rigorous study and theological education. We know that ideas have consequences. We believe that what you know and believe is of the utmost importance. But sometimes we go overboard. Sometimes we pay too much attention to the minute details of doctrine (which are important to differing degrees, depending on whether they are essentials of the faith or non-essentials), and not enough attention to the practical, experiential aspects of

the Christian life, which is to be lived out in the grace and power of the Holy Spirit who has come to take up residence in the life of every believer and every church.

Sometimes Presbyterians are described as “the frozen chosen” because our worship, in some cases, can be so solemn and formal, so lacking in passion, in zest, in emotion. To love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength (body) involves our emotions as well as our intellect. The same is true of worship, which is an expression of our love to God: To worship God with our whole being – with heart and soul and mind and strength (body) – has to include the offering of our emotions as an expression of our worship. In general, our Pentecostal brothers and sisters are much better at worshiping God with their emotions than we Presbyterians are. There is often a fire or intensity in their expression of worship that is not typically present in churches like ours. I’m not saying we should adopt a Pentecostal style of worship. But I think there is something we can learn from them about how to worship God in a way that engages every part of our being. (We can learn something from many of our African-American brothers and sisters in this regard as well.)

Can you be a Pentecostal *and* a Presbyterian? Can you be a Pentecostal and an *evangelical Presbyterian* at the same time? I suppose you can, but you can’t be both and still be consistent in what you believe, or how you live out your faith.

I am not a Pentecostal. But I do believe in the Holy Spirit. I do believe the Christian life – my life as a follower of Jesus and yours – is dependent on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in us for our good and for the glory of God. Our Pentecostal brothers and sisters rightly remind us that God the Holy Spirit is with us and in us, just as Jesus promised, and that He (the Spirit) has given us – *all* of us – spiritual gifts (*charismata* or grace-gifts) to be used for the benefit of the church, for the health and well-being of the body of Christ (Paul’s favorite analogy of the church [see 1 Corinthians 12:12-17 and Romans 12:4-5]), or, as Paul says in verse 7 of today’s Scripture reading, “for the common good.”

The Holy Spirit gives these *charismata*, these spiritual gifts, to enable us to minister to the needs of one another and our neighbors, to bear witness to the love of Jesus and the power of the gospel, to make a difference in the church and in the world around us, for the blessing of the church, for the blessing of the community in which God has placed us, and for the blessing of the world – all for the glory, honor, and praise of God who graciously gives good gifts to His people.

Paul talks about spiritual gifts – the gifts or *charismata* the Holy Spirit gives to us as followers of the Lord Jesus – here in 1 Corinthians 12 (in verses 4-11 and again at the end of the chapter in verses 28-30), and also in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. The apostle Peter chimes in as well in 1 Peter 4. I encourage you to take time to read and meditate on all these passages to gain a better, clearer understanding of what God’s Word says about spiritual gifts and their use in the life of the church.

We can define spiritual gifts as special endowments or capacities bestowed on believers by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, given to us according to God’s pleasure and for His purposes, to equip us for ministry in the church and/or the world around us. Spiritual gifts are

not the same as natural talents or abilities, although the spiritual gift(s) God gives you may – and usually do – dovetail with some natural talent and interest that are a part of your make-up.

We differentiate between God's *gift* of the Holy Spirit who was given to the first believers on the Day of Pentecost and to each of us in accordance with God's promise, and the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit, the *charismata* that the Holy Spirit gives to different believers. As Paul points out in verses 4-6, there are different gifts (*charismata*), but they are all freely given by the same Spirit (12:4). There are different ways of serving God, different ways of serving in the church, different forms of *diakonia*, but they all come from the same Lord and are intended to be done in a Christ-like spirit (12:5). There are different varieties of activities or works or "energies" (the word Paul uses is *energeemata*) that God produces through these spiritual gifts, but it is the same God who energizes or inspires them all (12:6).

They all come from God. They are all gifts of His grace. Which means that there is no room for boasting, as if God gave you a particular spiritual gift(s) because you are more spiritual than others, or as if having received a particular spiritual gift(s) *makes* you more spiritual than others. It also means there is no room for gift-envy. There is no room and no time to be envious of the spiritual gifts or opportunities or blessings God has given to others. Instead, it is incumbent on you to discover, accept, and develop the gift(s) God has given you, and then to diligently, lovingly, and cheerfully use your gift(s) to bless others in and through the church.

The exercise of your spiritual gifts is essential to the healthy functioning and spiritual growth of the church. Of *our* church. The exercise of your spiritual gifts is critically important in carrying out our mission as an intergenerational church family to make disciples of each generation, from the youngest to the oldest. The exercise of your spiritual gifts is vital if we are to fulfill our mission to love God wholly, to love one another sacrificially, and to love our neighbors – our community – actively and genuinely, in Jesus' name. The exercise of your spiritual gifts is essential.

I read recently – this comes from the Harvard Business review a few years ago, but I suspect the numbers are still about the same – that nearly 40 percent of shoppers purchase department store gift cards from time to time, and 33 percent purchase restaurant gift cards. According to the Journal of State Taxation (I'll bet that is a riveting read!), the typical American home has an average of \$300 in unused or unredeemed gift cards. These cards are often misplaced, accidentally thrown out, or only partially redeemed. Between 2005 and 2011, some \$41 billion in gift cards went unused.

Chew on that for a moment. Let that sink in. Forty-one billion dollars in gifts given, \$41 billion in gifts received that were not used. What a waste! And that is how it is when we let the gifts God gives us – the gifts of the Spirit – go unused, for whatever reason. In some cases it may be because we don't know what gifts we've been given, or how to use them. These are things that can be remedied through Bible study and fellowship with one another. In some cases, it may be because we're afraid – afraid of trying something and failing, or afraid the use of our gift(s) may put us in unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations. It could happen. But you might also discover a ministry that is more fulfilling than you ever

imagined. You might also experience the joy of blessing others in ways both small and large. You might discover that the Holy Spirit has gifted and shaped you in ways that make your contribution to the body of Christ both unique and essential. Because every *person*, every *member* of the body of Christ, and every *spiritual gift* matters.

The two lists of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 are not identical. There is some overlap between them, but some of the gifts in verses 8-10 are different from some of the gifts in verses 28-30. Likewise, the list of gifts in Romans 12 is not identical to the lists in 1 Corinthians 12 or Ephesians 4, which is also different from the others. Don't let that bother you. It simply means that none of the lists is complete. They are all lists of sample gifts. And if you put them all together, you probably still don't have a complete list of all the possible spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit may give to us. For example, even though hospitality does not appear in any of the lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament, I believe it is a gift the Holy Spirit gives to some believers – including some of you – to be used to build up the body of Christ, to extend the reach of the gospel, and to bring glory to God. Or, how about shortbread? *Making* shortbread may not be a spiritual gift, but who is to say that *making* and *bringing* it to church, week after week after week, as Evan Duncan does, is not evidence of a spiritual gift?

There is tremendous variety in the kinds of gifts the Spirit gives. If you look at the lists in the New Testament, you'll see that some are pretty miraculous. Others seem pretty ordinary or mundane. Generally speaking, there is nothing miraculous about spiritual gifts like serving or teaching or encouraging or contributing to the needs of others, or leadership in the church or doing acts of mercy (Romans 12:7-8), though God may use these gifts through you to have a miraculous impact in someone's life. You never know. Just because they aren't "spectacular" like some other gifts doesn't mean they are any less important to the healthy functioning of the church as the body of Christ or to the fulfillment of God's purposes for us. It just means that the gifts are all different from one another. You'll also see that spiritual gifts can be divided into the categories of speaking gifts and serving gifts, as it says in 1 Peter 4:11.

It is not my purpose today – nor do I have the spiritual insight – to tell each of you personally what your spiritual gifts may be. But I can tell you this: *God has given each of us – each of you – a spiritual gift (perhaps more than one) that He wants you to develop and use in the life and ministry of His church. God has created you in Christ Jesus to do good works, which He prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2:10), and He has given you the spiritual gift(s) you need to serve him in the ways and places you are needed. But what good is your gift if it goes unused? What good is it if you are content to sit and watch others use their gifts, but you refuse to get involved?*

I hope I'm not talking about you. But if I am, I urge you with all my heart to repent of your spiritual inertia. Repent of your unwillingness or refusal to serve in some ministry of the church. If it is keeping you from putting your gifts into action, repent of it. If a consumerist mentality (what can I get out of it?) has made you content to be on the receiving end of the church's ministry instead of giving of yourself in ministry, repent of it. Do you understand what I'm talking about?

I'm not a Kurt Vonnegut fan, but there is a transferable concept in his novel *Timequake*, which centers on characters who have lost control of their lives. Rather than determine their own destinies, they enter a "timequake" where they are forced to repeat the same bad choices over and over again without the possibility for improvement or redemption. Sounds like a kind of *Groundhog Day*, except with no chance for Bill Murray to ever get it right.

When the timequake finally ends and people once again have the chance to live their own lives, most are still gripped by Post-Timequake Apathy (or PTA), a condition that keeps them immobilized by despair. A character named Kilgore Trout is the only one who is not paralyzed by this state of apathy. He tries to revive others by repeating this motto: "You were sick, but now you're well, and there's work to do." (Kurt Vonnegut, *Timequake*, 196-197; Used in sermon by Mark Buchanan, "The House of Love")

With some minor alterations, this is a description of the experience of every Christian. Not: "You were sick and now you're well." But: "You were dead (in your sins), but now you're alive (in Christ), and there's work to do." Or: "You were lost (spiritually), but now you are found, and there's work to do." Or: "You were blind to the truth of the gospel, but now you can see, and there's work to do." There is work for you to do in Jesus' name, and the Holy Spirit has given you the gift(s) you need to fulfill your role in the church's ministry. There is work for us to do in Jesus' name, and the Holy Spirit has given us what we need, if we will use our gifts and interests and energies to serve Him together in the church, in our community, and in the world at large.

You don't need to be a Pentecostal Christian to have what Eugene Peterson called "the Pentecostal zest." You don't need to be a Pentecostal Christian to experience the presence, fullness, and power of the Holy Spirit in your life. You don't need to be a Pentecostal or a "Presbycostal" to put your spiritual gift(s) into action in order to build up the church, to extend the reach of the gospel, and to bring glory and honor to God. You just need to put your trust fully in Jesus. You just need to give yourself – your whole self – to the Lord in grateful devotion for all He has done for you.

You just need to make yourself available to serve in some ministry in the church or community where there is a need. And ask God to show you your spiritual gifts, if you don't know what they are.

Will you do that? As a way of loving and worshiping God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength?

Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.