

January 17, 2010

1 Cor. 12:1-12

John 2:1-11

What if church wasn't somewhere you go, but something you do?

ACT

During the month of January, our Youth Director, Jim Best, Pastor Bromleigh and I are seeking to respond to a provocative question lifted by our denomination, as we preach on Lectionary texts assigned for each Sunday.

That question is:

What if church wasn't somewhere you go, but something you do?

On Jan. 3, Bromleigh named for us a critical action for all who would follow Christ: SEARCH.

Last week we reflected on the baptism of Christ and the Isaiah text in which God states: YOU ARE MINE, promising his saving presence through raging waters and fiery infernos. That is the answer to the question, "Who am I"? We are the ones God claims as his own. God is fully **committed to us**, claiming us as he claimed his Son Jesus Christ at his baptism. God calls us to another critical action: **COMMIT** your life to following Christ.

When we commit our lives to Christ, that is not the END, but the BEGINNING. Commit your life to Christ and you will THEN BE ON THE MOVE, following where he leads.

What are things we as church must do?
SEARCH- for the sacred and holy
COMMIT- to the God who is committed to you.
And today we discover another: ACT.

As we consider the reading from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, we might think, "But this reading teaches us about BEING the church!" The church seems to be corporately struggling with the question we focused on last week, "Who are we?"

Indeed, the early Christian community struggled to define itself. Numerous issues arose that challenged its identity at every turn. There were disputes and misconceptions. One issue was especially confusing for the new believers: the action of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

The Corinthians were not clear about the differences between living as a Spirit-filled Body of Christ and living as part of one of the dozens of other pagan cults which also claimed to give their members spirits directly from the gods.

Paul sought to clear up their confusion. First, he said there is only one Spirit- and it is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ. Any voice that would denounce Christ is not the Holy Spirit we serve. Any voice that praises Christ can only come from the genuine Spirit of God.

Then Paul carefully addresses the still confusing fact that while there is only one genuine Spirit, its presence is manifested in a variety of ways. Paul assures the Corinthians of two truths:

First, there is a unique presence of the Spirit in each member of their community. **EVERYONE HAS A GIFT FROM THE SPIRIT.**

Second, this spiritual manifestation will always be directed toward the “common good”.

Paul then goes on to fearlessly enumerate a variety of gifts that the Spirit offers. He doesn't play down differences among the people, but seems eager to demonstrate that whether a gift is dramatic or subdued, easily seen by all, or quietly used in nearly invisible ways, **ALL OF THEM** come from the **SAME** Spirit and **ALL** of them have equal value.

So- if church is **SOMETHING WE DO**, what does this Scripture say about that?

This is what I hear: **USE** your **GIFT**. It will be **ACT**ivated by the Holy Spirit. **ACT**. The Holy Spirit has given you what you need to act, **AND** will guide your **ACTIONS**.

Unlike the Corinthian Christians, I don't think we brag about our gifts, or try to say certain ones are better than others. I think we totally ignore this whole

business. We don't think about gifts, don't think we have spiritual gifts. And since we haven't even identified our gifts, we don't USE them. We don't USE them period. Which means, of course, we aren't using them for the common good.

John Perkins talks about commitment and responsibility. Last week we were called to COMMIT our lives to CHRIST. Today we recognize that once we COMMIT to following Christ, we have the RESPONSIBILITY to ACT.

We ought to feel obligated as a body to make visible to the world the love of God. We ought to discharge that obligation with commitment: in word, in deeds, and in our general behavior- all three in harmony, not one of them as opposed to another one, not doing one today and the other one tomorrow.

Notice that Perkins states we must act as a BODY. Joyce Holliday echoes that theme:

The Spirit has no end of gifts to bestow. Wisdom, knowledge, faith. Healing and Prophecy. Many gifts, One Spirit. And the key: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." For the common good. Not for show. Not to Lord it over someone else. But for the building up of the body of Christ, the creation of community. Each of us has our gift to offer. EACH OF US IS OBLIGATED by faith to offer it. NO SLACKERS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD. Remember: Without you, the body of Christ is incomplete.

Friends, ACT. **There are to be no slackers in the house of God.** ACT. If you don't know what gift might be yours, just start with the gifts you believe you may have. God will reveal more to you as you move forward in action.

Are you beginning to see that church IS NOT somewhere you go, but something you do?

There is a communion benediction from Central America, based on a prayer from St. Teresa of Avila: *Christ has no body now on earth but yours.* We are called to DO God's work, living in God's way as the Body of Christ.

This is what I am hearing from God this morning: ACT. ACT TOGETHER. ACT FOR THE GOOD OF ALL- AND I MEAN ALL, NOT JUST THOSE WITHIN THE CHURCH. (Repeat.)

Friends, a tragic story brings these truths alive for me. Some years ago a little boy wandered from his South Dakota home. His parents couldn't find him. State police, Boy Scouts, neighbors and others joined in the search. For three days hundreds of people moved through the prairie, hoping to find the boy before he succumbed to the elements. On the morning of the fourth day, one of the searchers said, "Let's get organized in one long line. We'll join hands and sweep up and down the prairie until we find the boy. He can't have gone very far." They formed a line a quarter of a mile long. They made an impressive sight as they began to move through the prairie holding hands. On the third sweep they found the boy. The cold prairie nights had taken their toll. He was lying dead, in a small ditch behind some brush. Gently the boy's body was carried to where the mother was waiting. When they put the dead boy in his mother's arms, there was complete silence for a moment. Then she looked up and said: "Why didn't you join hands sooner? Why didn't you join hands sooner?"

ACT. ACT TOGETHER. ACT FOR THE GOOD OF ALL.

Friends, it matters. The world needs us to act. We need to join hands and DO the things God has planned for us, Baker Memorial United Methodist Church. This church is not something that is run by the staff. This church is not something you belong to. It is something you ARE. Together WE ARE THIS CHURCH. And if WE don't do both individually and together, what God expects of us, the common good is neglected.

Our Gospel lesson tells us about Jesus' first miracle. He changed water into wine at a wedding feast. His wine was the best wine. He took ordinary water, and made it into the finest wine.

The Lord who did that can take us, ordinary people, and make us into the people he created us to be. We are **gifted** people. We can choose to be a source of life and healing in a broken world. We are invited to become, in the hands of Christ, the finest wine.

ACT. ACT TOGETHER. ACT FOR THE GOOD OF ALL. Join Hands. We have the Lord Jesus Christ as our power. With him we can do this. Amen.