

Hallettsville

20 January 2019 1 Corinthians 12:1-2 (Eugene Peterson's *The Message*) What I want to talk about now is the various ways God's Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often mis-understood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable. Remember how you were when you didn't know God, led from one phony god to another, never knowing what you were doing, just doing it because everybody else did it? It's different in this life. God wants us to use our intelligence to seek to understand as well as we can.

### **GOD'S SPIRIT: OUR LIVES**

**Introduction:** We all know that God's Spirit moves within us and around us. But I have seen no burning bushes nor have I been struck blind nor do I speak in tongues. There are times when I might wish for Godly high drama – I need to not only see the writing on the wall, but I want it in neon lights! But it seems that God speaks to me quietly, at least most of the time. I suspect that Paul knew that God would be speaking to most of us quietly because the Apostle said that “God wants us to use our intelligence to seek to understand. . .” Understand what? To understand how the “Spirit gets worked into our lives.”

**Religious lives:** Let us start with the easiest one first. Surely the Spirit works in our religious lives and is easy to grasp. After all, religion is all about God's Spirit – or is it? One wonders. When I see a church picketing a serviceman's funeral, I have to ask myself, where is God's Spirit in that congregation? When I see divisions in the Church over the issue of inclusiveness, I wonder about God's Spirit in the debate. We even had congregations split and go their separate ways over disputes regarding the adoption of the 1979 Prayer Book! Do we really believe that God's Spirit is working in our religious lives when we debate, to the point of rupture, the relative merits of Rite One versus Rite Two?

I like to think of those examples as exceptions to the rule.

The rule being thousands of acts within the porous boundaries of the Church that are love motivated and love delivered. Of course, the Church serves many functions: educational, recreational, social, as well as spiritual. But what we look for is the opportunity for spiritual growth in all of those activities. We also must find that the various actions of the Church are infused with the Spirit of God. Whether it is the Easter service or a Christmas lunch and bake sale, God must be working through our lives to make that activity spiritually meaningful.

In our smallest churches we sometimes become obsessed with financial survival. We need to remember that the Church does not operate on a business model. Our bottom line is not financial profit. The church's bottom line is always spiritual growth. Yes, we need to pay the bills, but we must make even bill paying a Spiritual exercise. How does God's Spirit get worked into our religious lives? The answer is easy, the implementation sometimes difficult: In all parts of our religious lives the motivation must be spiritual growth.

**Family lives:** For most of us, the center of our personal universe is our family. Large or small, primary or extended, the family is our safe place and our challenge. If we are fortunate, the Church was an integral part of our childhood and is an essential place in our families. Having God's assurance of love and constancy helps to give meaning to family life which is constantly buffeted by the forces of materialism and social psychological strife. I know that God's Spirit was in my young family, but when I had two teenagers in the house at one time, I often felt that there were more malign spirits busily making life as difficult as possible. Fortunately, if we are patient, even teens grow up. God's Spirit helps us to tolerate the personal hurts and family disasters that most of us encounter. As we grow older spirituality gives us the ability to rise above physical pain and develop more surely our hope for a future. God's Spirit may manifest itself in the formal ways of Church attendance and family devotions or it may be seen in a myriad of little things from grace at meals to loving hugs. In any case, we have the opportunity of working God's Spirit into our family lives in a

manner that establishes love as the family's first principle.

**Work lives:** If our families are the center of our personal universes, our work must be a very large planet in our personal solar system! One may be fortunate enough to work in an environment that encourages personal, even spiritual growth and provides us with a nurturing environment. But many of us work in fields or for companies that make even simple morality a major challenge. There is nothing evil in money – the evil creeps in in how we gain it and use it. We may well find that compromises with integrity are demanded of us. You may have to decide just where that line of refusal is. I use to give ethics workshops to police officers and as I listened to their stories or watched their behavior in the field, I could vividly see how ethical behavior was frequently challenged. As a small example, try to remember that alcoholism is a disease as you are cleaning the vomit off your neck in a patrol car, courtesy of the drunk you have just put in the back seat. Even here, God's Spirit is at work. Your challenge is to remain spiritually aware even in the worst of circumstances. God's Spirit gets worked into our lives in a multitude of ways and provides us with both the challenge to deal with ethical problems and the grace with which we may successfully solve those problems.

**Community lives:** To be a Christian is to be in a community of believers, but it is also to be the Christian leaven in the larger community in which we find ourselves.

Episcopalians are not very likely to be found on the street corner preaching to the masses. Evangelism and Episcopal both begin with the letter "e" but oftentimes seem to have no other relationship! We can take solace in the old saying that the best sermon is a Godly life. That may not bring too many folks to the pews, but it does constitute the very best Christian outreach.

We don't have to wear our faith on our sleeves, but rather simply act as God's Spirit moves us to be effective evangelists. A concern for the poor, the oppressed, for those in prison and for the public servants who care for them, that is God's Spirit at work. Whether it is a Rotary Club lunch or a meals on wheels delivery, we can serve God's Spirit by doing what needs to be

done with God's love made manifest in our actions.

**Conclusion:** In our religious, family, work and community lives we are to strive to use our gifts for the "common good."

Paul says that "God wants us to use our intelligence to seek to understand as best we can." Our souls are whole, not fragmented. While we accept many things on "faith", Paul tells us that God wants us to have a faith, informed by intelligence.

He notes that we are to seek to understand, "as best as we can." We will not know all, we will not understand all. We are not God. We are told to bring our complete selves to Church.

Doubts and sins included. We should not leave our brains at the narthex, but we need to walk them right up to the altar. I like these words from Emily Dickinson: "The brain is just the weight of God, For, lift them, pound for pound, And they will differ, if they do, As syllable from sound." Amen.

(from *The Brain is wider than the sky*)