

The Invitation (Come to me, you who are weary)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Our Sermon Text is taken from:

The First letter of Paul to the Corinthians 14: 1-3, 20-25 (The Passion Translation)

¹ *It is good that you are enthusiastic and passionate about spiritual gifts, especially prophecy, (which is to interpret the divine will and purpose in inspired preaching and teaching.)*

² *When someone speaks in tongues, no one understands a word he says, because he's not speaking to people, but to God – he is speaking intimate mysteries in the Spirit.*

³ *But when someone prophesies, she speaks to encourage people, to build them up, and to bring them comfort.*

²⁰ *Beloved ones don't remain as immature children in your reasoning. As it relates to evil, be like newborns, but in your thinking be mature adults.*

²¹ *For it stands written in the Law, "I will bring my message to this people with strange tongues and foreign lips, yet even then they still will not listen to me", says the Lord. (Isa 28: 11, 12).*

²² *So then, tongues are not a sign for believers, but a miracle for unbelievers. Prophecy, on the other hand, is not for unbelievers, but a miracle sign for believers.*

²³ *If the entire church comes together and everyone is speaking in tongues, won't the visitors say that you have lost your minds?*

²⁴ *But if everyone is prophesying, and an unbeliever or one without the gift enters your meeting, she will be convicted by all that she hears and will be called to account,*

²⁵ *for the intimate secrets of her heart will be brought to light. He will be mystified and fall face down in worship and say, "God is truly among you!"*

This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Father God, open our understanding so that we can hear your Word. Help us also to preach and teach so that all may hear your Word and through the enlightenment of Your Spirit come to you. Amen.

Dear Congregation

Nguni, de menei, pistis, elpis, agape, ta tria tauta: meidzon de touton he agape.

Probably you're thinking: What on earth is she saying? I wonder if there is somebody here who can interpret what I have just said. (Anyone?)

Did it make sense to anyone? Well, it would have made sense for those who know ancient Greek, for I said: (And) now these stay: faith, hope and love, these three, but of these (three), love is the greatest.

So, no I didn't speak in tongues, but I spoke a foreign tongue. To the ancient Greek person, it was music to the ears and heart. Maybe they would have smiled at my pronunciations but would've known what I was saying. For many of us, it could just be noise, because we don't understand ancient Greek. Through studying and listening we can learn and understand new languages, however, we will not benefit by the most inspired Greek preaching, if we do not have someone to interpret it for us in our own mother tongue. Likewise, with any other language we do not understand, - and that also includes the tongues given by the Spirit -, called "glossalalia". Isn't that a lovely word! "Glossalalia". "Glossa", means tongue in Greek and "lalia" means to talk. Originally the word "glossalalia" meant to start speaking a language that you did not know or understand, or talking in a trance-like state, words that are sounds, but carry no meaning for the speaker or for listeners.

Can you imagine that? Paul says, this is certainly very strange for outsiders, so much so that they might think that something is very wrong when they encounter this, especially in a place of Christian worship!

Let us follow the Apostle Paul's thoughts on "glossalalia."

Chapter Fourteen gives instructions on the gifts of the Spirit, but it follows the greater Chapter on love in First Corinthians 13! Here Paul taught that love does not boast, and love does not harm. He opens this Chapter Fourteen with an appeal to this love that he has spoken of, and says that all Spiritual Gifts should be exercised in a Spirit of love and concern for the others in the body of Christ, more than concern for oneself and one's own spirituality.

Now, the city of Corinth was a wild and wonderful city, a cosmopolitan city full of the vices and evils of a world trade port, as well as the virtues of conveniences and opportunities of such a busy city. In Corinth there were different temples with diverse ways of worshipping the many deities, or gods, the people believed in. Some of these practices included trance like states of talking and babbling. They used a few words, over and over, in meaningless repetition; to invoke the blessing of the gods. These magical words were used to entice the people in the temples to believe the Oracles' strange and wonderful sounds and sentences- that nobody understood- but trusted that it had some super-human powers. Something like abracadabra worship. The dictionary tells us that words like, abracadabra, is used to make people think that the person who utters it, has profound knowledge and wisdom.

It is very important to Paul that the Christian Church and its practices must not be confused with the temples and idols of the cultures and creeds around them. He is warning the Christians in Corinth to build themselves and the other worshippers in the Church up with preaching and teaching in a language that everybody can understand, for this is orderly and shows unifying love and community among the Christians. It is inviting to those who have not yet started to follow the Christian Way, for it is clear and communicates God's love through Jesus Christ. This love should be shown in the church. The congregation must be taught that their lives resemble the new life that they have taken up,

namely that of Christ, who lives in them. This can only happen with inspired teaching and preaching from the Word of God. Sometimes the word "prophecy" lets one think of things happening in the future, something like fortune-telling, but this is something that the false prophets did. They took the word of the times they lived in and applied it to the people's lives, instead of taking the Word of God, as the standard, and teaching and preaching from it, showing people where and how the words of Scripture have and still are being fulfilled!

This is what Paul wants every Christian to do. For every believer will receive the Gifts of the Spirit, and the greatest gift is to be able to witness and tell others of Christ. This is true preaching and teaching. This is why we as Lutherans believe that we are the Priesthood of Believers, for all of us, through our baptism, have the power of the indwelling Spirit of God to confess that Jesus is Lord and declare it from the Scriptures. In Joel 2: 28 God promised: "And afterwards I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophecy" and in Acts 2:17, when Peter explained to the residents of Jerusalem what happened at this wonderful event of Pentecost, he used this exact quote from the Prophet Joel. So, inspiring teaching and preaching come from the Scriptures. This is witnessing to the fulfilment of Scripture in the lives of people.

This "talking in tongues" was not the special language that is uttered by an individual in communication with God, a language that is understood by God and given for the building up of the person's prayer and spiritual life. Such "talking in tongues" is clearly for the benefit of the person speaking in tongues and not for the community in the church, for it does not build them up, as they do not understand the language.

The “speaking in tongues” of Pentecost, when the Spirit came as flames of fire, gave the power to speak in the languages of the people who were there in Jerusalem, of all creeds and persuasions. We read that peoples’ hearts were warmed as they heard in their own dialect, the Message of the Death and Resurrection and Reconciliation to the Father through Jesus Christ, preached powerfully by the disciples. We read in Acts 2: 4 “And after they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in other, different, foreign languages as the Spirit kept giving them clear and loud expression in different mother tongues and dialects with the appropriate words.” Paul says in Ephesians that Jesus came, just as Isaiah 57:9 promised, and “He preached the glad tidings of peace to you who were afar and peace to those who were near... therefore we are no longer outsiders, but belong to the household of God.” When Jesus was preaching and teaching at the meal which he enjoyed at the Pharisee’s house, we read in Luke 14, He said: “And the servant returning to his master said, Sir, what you have commanded me to do has been done, and yet there is room. Then the Master said to the servant, go out to the highways and the hedges and urge and constrain them to yield and come in, so that my house may be filled...” This is the gift of the Spirit, inspiring teaching and preaching, calling into the house of the Lord, all those who are heavy laden and burdened, and “everyone who is thirsty! Come to the waters: and those who have no money, come, buy and eat! Yes, come and buy priceless spiritual wine and milk without money and without price. (Isaiah 55:1).

Dear Congregation,

This love that is kind and does not boast, can speak in the Spirit, but also with the mind, can sing in the Spirit, but also with the understanding mind. This love is mindful of the gift of talking in a spiritual tongue but does not use it as a measuring tool to determine other Christians’ spiritual temperature. The Christian uses it as a private prayer tool, bringing

the world and the needs of this world and her people to the Father.

Paul says that one should aspire to teach and preach so that people are convinced, convicted and converted to Christ, using words and language that will be readily comprehended. Inviting words, like Jesus did, “Come to me, you who are weary”. The gifts of the Spirit are great gifts that God gives to his children. They are generally divided in three groups namely speaking gifts, knowing gifts and power gifts and they are used for the common good of God’s people and congregations (1 Cor 12:7). The speaking gifts are: tongues, interpretation of tongues and prophecy. The knowing gifts are: Words of Wisdom, Words of Knowledge and Discerning of Spirits. The power gifts are: faith, healing and miracles. These are all spiritual gifts that God gives to people according to their own nature and talents. The body of Christ consists of apostles, prophets, teachers, and workers of miracles, those with gifts of healing, those who help others, those with gifts of administration and those who can speak different tongues. The gifts are signs from God and a witness to the working of the Spirit of God on earth, and evidence that his children are spirit-filled (Act 1:8), being his witnesses. But we also know that these gifts will come to pass one day. “For we know our knowledge is fragmentary, incomplete and imperfect and our prophecy is fragmentary, incomplete and imperfect and will vanish away. But when the complete and perfect (total) comes, the incomplete and imperfect will vanish away (1 Cor 13: 9-10).

Yes, we all receive gifts of the Spirit, but the fruit of the Spirit, “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” will not pass away. These continue to grow in us for we can do nothing without the Lord, who is within us (John 15:5).

The Spirit takes our words, purifies them and offers them as sermons and sentences, songs and sayings to build up the body of Christ, the Ultimate Word, the Enfleshed Word of God, the cornerstone of all our “talking in tongues” Amen.

May the peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, that passes all understanding, guide your hearts, minds and your tongues until He comes in glory. Amen.