

Sept 29/24 – Leader’s Guide - 1 Corinthians 12; Matthew 9: 35-10:1, 5-8

Read Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5-8

1. Jesus’ ministry was centered around three things. What were they and how do they relate to the kingdom of God?

Proclaiming, teaching, healing...

Proclaiming – “Repent the Kingdom of God is at hand” – God’s future Kingdom is breaking into the present.

Teaching – this is what the life – the zoe – of the Kingdom looks like – a life of love of service of forgiveness of mercy – see places like the sermon on the mount for further detail – called by many the manifesto of the kingdom.

Healing – Signs of Kingdom come – the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, those under the hold of the demonic are freed etc.

Jesus looks out over the crowd beholding their brokenness, pain, disease, sorrow and affliction and has compassion. This is the strongest word in the Greek language for compassion, it is a gut-wrenching compassion that leads one to action.

2. What response does Jesus’ compassion bring about? Do you sense that this only applies to the disciples or that this sets a pattern for every subsequent follower of Jesus?

Jesus calls his disciples to himself and tells them the harvest is plentiful, the needs are astronomical, but there are very few laborers. He then invites them to pray – pray that the Lord would send laborers. Then – perhaps in answer to their prayer – he gathers them together and gives them authority, the authority to do the same things he has been doing – proclaiming, teaching, healing.

Does this set a pattern? I believe so, I think we see that in the passage from 1 Corinthians 12. I preached out of a conviction that it does.

This does not mean however this is a settled consistent conviction amongst followers of Jesus - you may encounter within your group those who believe that yes the church continues to proclaim and teach about the kingdom, but these signs of kingdom come – these healings were only a part of the ministry of the apostles. This is a conviction that is often called cessationism. The belief that these gifts ceased after the apostles died. They were only operative as the church was beginning.

If this is a conviction that is present in the group it might be helpful to explore it a little so that it is more fully understood and engaged with. It may prove difficult however to press forward with subsequent questions if some theologically are unprepared to go where the questions lead.

I, Tim, deeply respect those who hold such convictions for I understand where they are coming from. There is some concern that believing the Spirit is still operative in this way means that "words" from God can trump the revelation of scripture. I believe any "word" from God must be held up against the revealed word of God in Jesus, in scripture. If you are able invite them to continue to hold the conviction but invite them to give space for further conversation to happen.

Read 1 Corinthians 12

Paul, the writer, is providing a corrective to the Corinthians ordering the spiritual gifts (Jesus' ministering abilities) in terms of their perceived importance. This ordering is causing division in their communal life, inhibiting what the Spirit is doing in their midst. In his corrective word we are given the most comprehensive teaching on spiritual gifts that we find in the New Testament.

3. (vs. 1-11) What are some general truths you can glean from this portion of the text around spiritual gifts? Which truth is most personally meaningful and why?

Those with the more highly valued gifts were saying - because I have this gift it is evidence that I have within me the Spirit of God - his life, his Zoe. Since you do not have this gift you don't have the Spirit of God within you. Paul firmly stands against this belief saying that the Spirit of God is within everyone who claims Jesus as Lord.

The Spirit of God does many things in the life of the follower of Jesus but Paul is concerned here with one thing. In vs. 7 he says everyone has been given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Everyone is given a portion of Jesus' ministering abilities so that we might grow up into the fullness of who we are called to be as the body of Christ.

4. (vs. 12-31) Paul gives us the image of the body to not only provide a corrective to their ordering the importance of spiritual gifts but also to point to his ultimate desire for them as a church. What is that ultimate desire? What are some of the things we could do at little t to press more and more toward that?

His ultimate desire is that all the gifts would be given space to be expressed for the benefit of all.

What could we do?

Value all of the gifts. Every community values some gifts more than others. At little t in our most recent history we have valued the word gifts. Word gifts – according to Dr. Robert Clinton of Fuller Seminary are gifts which clarify the nature action and purposes of God. We value the place of the preached word. Have spent much time and energy and resources forming children and youth. Have many small

groups where we deepen in God's word. This is absolutely wonderful – there is much to celebrate – we thank God for the work of the word gifts in our midst.

But where some are more highly valued others are diminished. These are the love gifts that make manifest the love of God in practical ways – and the power gifts that demonstrate the power presence and purposes of God. These have not been as highly valued or expressed in our midst.

How do we value these other gifts? Give space for them to be expressed. Encourage those who have them by sharing how their gifts have served you / us. This will encourage them to offer it more often.

Pray. As Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray earnestly for more laborers. Let us look out upon the needs of those around us – in our small groups – in our church – in our neighbourhoods and ask the Lord to pour out upon us the abundance of the spiritual gifts that we might address those needs.

Offer our own gifts – let us not hold back our gifts from being expressed. We are diminished as a community when the gifts of some are not given expression.

Read Romans 12: 4-8; Ephesians 4:11-14; 1 Peter 4:9-11

5. What are the gifts that the Spirit gives to those who are in Christ? What do each look like in practice?

I've adapted these from Jon Thompson's book Convergence

- I. *Love gifts – make manifest the love of God in practical ways.*

Administration – support for leadership – organizing, streamlining, clarifying

Helps / Hospitality – practical service for those in need – be it greeting , welcoming, one to one serving, opening home to others for food – a place to live

Mercy – presence with those who are broken, abused, disenfranchised – not just with feeling of compassion and empathy but with active compassion

Giving - always open and ready to give of time or treasure to meet the needs of others – to support the work of the gospel.

- II. *Word gifts – clarify the action, nature and purposes of God.*

Teaching – applying the truths of scripture to the life of the follower of Jesus

Encouragement – able to give perceptive timely pointed words of support and encouragement to others

Exhortation – able to give a perceptive timely pointed word that invites a person in love to face something that needs to be faced – often leading to repentance

Leading – exercising influence over a group to lead it forward toward a vision or goal

Pastor / Shepherd – able to have personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of Jesus followers – not necessarily in an ordained office

Evangelism – ability to verbalize the good news to others when given opportunity

III. Power Gifts – demonstrate the power, presence and purposes of God.

Prophecy – a word of a predictive nature, or situational word from God

Tongues – speaking in an unknown language that may aid in personal prayer but also can be spoken out loud in a community to edify the body.

Interpretation of Tongues – while the speaker of tongues may not know what they have said you can interpret it for the benefit of those who heard it – it may be a word of encouragement, or exhortation.

Intercessory prayer – bringing the needs of others before God in prayer, all of us are invited to such a work but those with this gift can do so for hours with joy and endurance.

Faith – ability to discern with extraordinary confidence the will or purpose of God for His work

Discernment of Spirits – the ability to recognize if something comes from God or not, discern motivations of others, discern demonic influence

Healing – to bring healing to body mind or spirit

Miracles – authority over nature or the demonic

Word of knowledge – insight into others that can only come from God – that expressed in God's power can bring healing and wholeness

Words of Wisdom – with that insight into the lives other others those with this gift can share what next step is the right one to press into God's purpose

6. Do you have a sense of what your gift might be? How have you seen it impact others to support them in living into Zoe (the full life of the kingdom)?

I would encourage you to take some time in prayer to reflect on how you might work through these questions (6 & 7) as how well these questions land or get engaged with will likely depend upon the openness and trust built into your group as well as people's openness to share what they think their gift might be. There can be a humility that keeps people from saying – I think my gift is _____

It might be helpful to say right up front. Whatever your spiritual gift(s) might be is given as a gift so sharing what you believe your gift is isn't prideful it is an expression of thanks and gratitude to the giver of those gifts – God himself...

The delicate reality to navigate will be the person who believes they don't have any gifts or that perhaps difficult person in your group who others find it hard to say encouraging things to and about.

Perhaps it might help to have some questions ready to help trigger some thinking before you even get into the last two questions. Here are some thoughts...

What activity in the life of the church – in your life of faith – gives you the most joy?

What ticks you off the most in the church when you don't see it functioning effectively?

What breaks your heart the most? Stirs up your compassion?

You may even want to switch questions 6 and 7 depending on how you think the conversation may go.

7. Spend some time reflecting on one another's gifts – encourage one another where you have seen or experienced the impact of their gift – close in prayer for one another in this vein.

See above...