One Body

I Corinthians 12:3-13

One of my favorite comfort foods used to be the combination of baked beans and hotdogs. Sometimes I could sit down and eat almost a whole can of beans with the cut up hotdogs. So it was one day that I found myself craving that particular dish. I went to the store, grabbed a can of beans and some hotdogs, rushed home and began the simple preparation. Now you would think that heating up beans and franks together would be a simple thing. I got the pan out, turned the stove on, and proceeded to open the can of beans. As I began to pour the beans into the pan, I was surprised to see that there were no beans in the can at all, only the delicious liquid that gives the wonderful flavor to the beans. Well of course you can’t make beans and franks without the beans.

Remembering that incident gave me some pause for thought. One of the essential ingredients of being a Christ follower is the Spirit we have been given when we came to believe. It is this Spirit that moves and directs the church to do its work for God. Today we celebrate the coming of the Spirit to birth the church and help us become the movers and shakers of the world, the light that God wants to get people to pay attention and become what he created them to be. As the One Body of Christ we are given the task of being Christ’s hands and feet in this world. And it is in that way that the church in every generation moves faith forward, gathering in lost and directionless souls.

But I think back to that can of beans. What if the Spirit that binds us together, has no one to bind together? What if we began to ignore the Spirit’s movement within us and follow our own direction? What if we decided that we just didn’t want to come to church anymore, or be a part of following Christ? What would the church become? Maybe an empty can of beans. The church certainly would not be effective in doing God’s work. The wonderful food that we can give to others would not be made.

Least we go too far with this analogy, there are some things to be remembered. First and foremost it is the Spirit that draws people to faith, that draws people to God. So when a church loses some of its gifts, the Spirit gives the needed gifts to others and draws them in to strengthen the work needed to be done.

Secondly, every one of us has been given gifts with which to live out our faith in the body of Christ. And no one gift is more important than any other. Some gifts are obvious such as the ability to preach or teach, or pray, or sing. But those gifts are worthless unless there is someone to hear. Sometimes it is the seemingly most minor gift that makes the church thrive. The one who cheerfully sits and peels potatoes at our Saturday breakfast, the one who quietly sends cards to those in need, the one who decorates an altar, or readies the church for Sunday morning worship, the one who greets or provides refreshments for gathering after worship, the one who sits in the pews attending to what God is offering them, the one who greets the stranger or welcomes a visitor, the one who makes a statement of faith during a Bible study. These are all part of being the body of Christ, part of being in a sense of Oneness, all offering what we can to God.

This past week was a difficult one. My sister requested that I do the funeral for my niece’s husband who died suddenly last Saturday at the age of 32. The people involved were not particularly religious people and I wondered what message would have an impact on them. There were lots of questions about “why?”, “how could this happen?”, “what will happen to the young wife and her 3 children?”. And I wondered how could this aunt make it through the service when my own heart was breaking for my niece. And here is where the Spirit comes in. A simple message preceded by beautiful words from scripture, a few prayers, a celebration of life all came together to bring comfort and a word about death to think about. The Spirit had joined in the celebration of life. Tears and laughter combined to begin the process of healing. A child’s questions about the coldness of his dad’s body gave opportunity for some to search for answers and find words of faith to give him answer. A literal barrage of mosquitoes at the grave site gave cause for some to share repellent and laugh about how the man who had died was having the last laugh on everyone. The Spirit had done its work in giving people of little faith reason to pause and ponder the great mysteries of life.

The Spirit is the mechanism God uses to work with us to bring about the transformation of the world. The Spirit is what flavors us and gives us the ability to do God’s work. The Spirit is the one who gives us our gifts to use in building the body of Christ, in making the can filled. The gifts each of us brings with us to this place makes us who we are and completes the body of Christ in this area of the world. Each one of us is important! That is what we celebrate this day!

There are Sundays when I am done with my sermon, and the Spirit literally takes over. An important point has not been made, some piece of faith that needs to be shared. And there are some Sundays when I start out wondering what I am saying and not feeling like preaching at all. That’s when the Spirit begins to assert itself and moves the service of worship forward into the awareness of God’s presence even stronger. The Spirit opens doors to us as we worship on Sunday mornings.