

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Sunday, May 28, 2023
1 Corinthians 12:3-11

Gifted

Come Holy Spirit and open our eyes to see wonderful things in your teaching. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A week ago, a young man named Clovis Hung graduated from college. He earned not just one degree, but 5 separate degrees! Oh, did I mention Clovis is only 12 years old!? When someone has abilities like that, we often say they are *gifted*.

Dear fellow believers in Jesus Christ, God's Word says *you* are **gifted—gifted** by the Holy Spirit. The greatest of the gifts that He gives you is far more amazing and valuable than the ability to earn degrees or play sports or any other skill.

The Apostle Paul directs us to this great and miraculous gift with this verse: **No one speaking by God's Spirit says, "A curse be upon Jesus," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.**

There are only two options when it comes to what you believe and speak about Jesus. It is either **Jesus is Lord** or **a curse be upon Jesus**. There is no middle ground.

Ok, but what does it mean that **Jesus is Lord**? Certainly it means He is the One true God. He is fully and truly God just as the Father is truly God and just as the Holy Spirit is fully God. To say Jesus is anything less than true God is to reject the one and only Triune God. Just as John's Gospel says: **All should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him** (5:23)

But just knowing Jesus is true God will not save you. After all, even the devil knows that!

So to say and believe **Jesus is Lord** is to believe Jesus is the God who saves us, what is what He tells us about His name LORD in Exodus: **The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, overflowing with mercy... forgiving guilt and rebellion and sin** (Ex 34:6-7).

To confess **Jesus is LORD** is to believe the book of Isaiah says: **I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior** (43:3) So to say **Jesus is Lord** means to trust He is the only way we are saved.

And that means **Jesus is Lord** is to confess that we are so sinful, lost and condemned that we deserve only death and hell from the very first moment of our life inside our mother's womb and left to ourselves we only go down-hill from there.

And therefore, it took nothing less than God the Son becoming a human being to live in our place, to suffer hell and death on the cross to save us. **Jesus is Lord** means we desperately need forgiveness and that we have that forgiveness freely from Jesus who gives it to us in His Word. **Jesus is Lord** means He has conquered sin and death to raise us up to life everlasting!

Here's how Martin Luther summed up and explained what it means that **Jesus is Lord** in the *Small Catechism*: *I believe that Jesus Christ, true God... and also true man... is my Lord. He has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.*

To say anything else than that we are saved by Jesus Christ alone is to say **A curse upon Jesus**. After all, if we think there is something we can do, no matter how small to be saved, then we are essentially saying to God: Jesus lived that holy life and suffered and died for no reason at all, it was all worthless – or another words: *a curse upon Jesus*.

So it is a gift of God that Jesus saved us. But it is also a gift of God when we believe it and so enjoy what Jesus has done for the world. Just as the Apostle writes: **no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit**.

It couldn't be more clear – it couldn't be more humbling to our pride – but it can't be more clear. There is no other way to interpret this plain statement of Scripture. **No one** means **no one**. If anyone believes and says **Jesus is Lord**, Jesus is my Savior, it is only because of God **the Holy Spirit**.

Paul is teaching us here that on our own, apart from **the Holy Spirit** we cannot make a choice for Jesus, instead we only have the horrible, sinful ability to reject Jesus in unbelief.

The Bible makes this point over and over again in both the Old Testament as well as the New. Consider how Paul teaches this in Ephesians chapter 2: **you were dead in your trespasses and sins... but God, because he is rich in mercy... made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses**.

You see if faith were even in some small way our doing or our ability, or our choice then we would not need God's **mercy** and the Bible would not call us **dead**. Those who are **Dead** cannot make a choice or cooperate with you.

Once when deer hunting, I once shot a big buck deep, in the woods at the bottom of a steep hill. So what happened next? Well, obviously I told that dead deer he should help me out and get up and walk along with me out of the woods by his own power. Nope. Doesn't work like that, does it? Dead can't cooperate, so I had to drag that deer all the way out of the woods.

So when God says we come into this world spiritually dead He must do everything! He must carry us and He must make us alive. He must *give* us the faith to trust in Jesus' forgiveness. So to believe **Jesus is Lord** is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Which is exactly how another Bible verse puts it: **It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves it** (that is the faith through which you are saved) **it is the gift of God...**

That means as a believer in Jesus you are truly **gifted** – **Gifted** by the Holy Spirit with faith in Jesus. This is the gift of spiritual life in place of spiritual death.

That's why the Bible also in other places (John's Gospel and Revelation) calls faith a **resurrection** and also **being born again**. Children don't give themselves life, but they *are* born, given life by God through their parents.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit gives us the new life of faith in Jesus through Gospel, the good news of Jesus' holiness and forgiveness poured out on us in the promise of Baptism and in the words of God's mercy in the Bible.

And just think what this **gift** of faith brings us: our guilt is removed, our sin is paid for, and we will rise from death to eternal joys with our Savior God! All that Jesus won and belongs to Him He gives to us in Word and Sacrament and it becomes our very own through Holy Spirit **gifted** faith! Instead of death we have life; instead of hell we have heaven, all God's gift made ours through the gift of faith. Oh how we have been amazingly **gifted**!

And because that is so, because the Holy Spirit gives us new hearts of faith, we want to thank and serve our Savior God. And so the Holy Spirit gives us other gifts so that we can do that and show our love for Jesus, he gives us abilities, and talents that we can use in thanks to our Lord. Paul says: **There are various kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit... each person is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing to each one individually as He (the Spirit) desires.**

Paul lists a number of gifts in our reading, some that still exist today, like **prophecy** – that is the ability to teach and preach God's Word or great **faith** that endures and shines despite heavy troubles.

He also mentions gifts like the **miracles** the Apostles could do or the ability to speak in **tongues** – other languages, gifts the Holy Spirit only gave for a time to the early Church while the New Testament was still being written.

Of course, the Holy Spirit also gives other gifts to His Church today not mentioned here, like the ability to use technology to make God's Word available around the world.

If you have a skill like playing an instrument or to being a good listener, or able to organize or to teach children or encourage others or any other number of abilities, then it came from the Holy Spirit who gives you the faith to use it in thanksgiving for Jesus.

The Spirit gives every believer different types of gifts, but they all serve the same purpose: **for the common good.**

You see the Holy Spirit has individually given us the gift of faith in Jesus and He gives us each individual gifts, but He does not want us to be out there on our own scattered as individuals. Instead He gathers us together into His Church where we serve God by serving each other with our **Spirit** given gifts.

You are **gifted** by God the Holy Spirit so that may reflect Jesus' love by serving others not only in worship and in the work of the congregation, but also at home and work and wherever you go. What's more, He has also given you the **gift** of fellow believers who have different gifts than you do, so that they may serve you as they honor Christ.

So it is no overstatement to say everything we have is a gift from God – not just our life and bodies and all we own and all around us, not just forgiveness and peace and eternal life, but even the faith that believes it!

On this great day of Pentecost, be amazed at how richly God has **gifted** you and then go to live as the Spirit **gifted** believer He makes you. Amen.

Come Holy Spirit. Renew our hearts and kindle in us the fire of your love. Amen.