

Bryce already read for us an account of God's Spirit descending on the disciples that were praying in the upper room. Many people were convicted and came to know and love and desired to follow the way of Christ that day. We all know that this was just the beginning – the appetizer for how God's Spirit would travel beyond Jerusalem and beyond the Hebrew people. From that place and time in Jerusalem the Spirit of God moved quickly. Soon there were disciples going out as missionaries all over the Roman Empire bringing people to the Way of Christ. And many new Christians suddenly became sisters and brothers in the way.

Now, one cannot say that the Spirit of God is all smooth and soft – no. While sometimes, when we desperately need the comforter, the Spirit of God is that for us. But more often than not, God's Spirit moving in us and in our world is, as it says in scripture: as a mighty wind, a fierce fire, an earthquake, a flood of living water. And this Spirit of God rushed in like a mighty wind or a deluge of living water and filled each church and every member in the church and they were ON FIRE with the Spirit. As you can imagine, it made for lively conversation.

Paul, the apostle, evangelist, debater, and missionary for Christ had been exploring with the Corinthian church what it meant to be people together. The Church of Corinth was a new thing – a church plant. And the three missionaries to Corinth, Paul, Apollos and Cephas (Peter), taught the Hebrew and the Gentile Christians many things about Christ. Unfortunately, while they agreed on many things, like the importance of living like Christ, learning to bear the cross like Christ, and reimagining the Hebrew laws, the three missionaries to the Corinthians were teaching sometimes conflicting messages. The Christians in Corinth were passionate with their disagreements, and it didn't take long for sides and camps to form. Some in the Corinthian church were saying that Apollos' teaching was where it was at – and anyone else was wrong. Others were saying Paul was always right – and still others were saying that all of them were wrong because Peter taught what was true and right. I can well imagine that things in the body were noisy, difficult, occasionally dissatisfying, and, by the sound of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, confrontational and argumentative.

There were arguments about communion – and how to do it and who could take it – To which Paul instructed the wealthy not to eat and drink so much that there wasn't any left for the slaves, who came to the love feast after work. There were arguments about sexuality – could a man in the church sleep with his father's wife? To which Paul gave a resounding “NO!” There were arguments about the wisdom of gossiping women, the resurrection of the body, divorce and remarriage and singleness...to name only a few.

Based on what I've read, the Corinthian church had more problems all at once than we've ever had in 123 years. They were in danger of splitting all apart. But, unlike us here, there was no other church in the neighbourhood to go to...they had to stick together.

Our church isn't like the one in Corinth – it can't be – because Christianity isn't a new thing for most of us here. However – we ARE a lot like the church in Corinth. And by we – I mean all the churches in the western world. Numbers of Christians are dwindling – new converts are hard to find – people have stopped attending church because it “no longer speaks to them” or its just another thing that you have to do and “I'm tired of doing things.” And whether we like it or not politics wiggle their way into our holy community – dividing members from each other to the left and right – and those seeking to bridge the gap are seen as fence sitters instead of bridge builders. It's no wonder things in the larger and smaller church are sometimes difficult, noisy, occasionally dissatisfying, and argumentative. And then we add

to that the fact that we actually really love each other – we love Christ, and we love the church and – well - then we have a recipe for literal and figurative heartburn.

I suspect Paul would say something to us like what he wrote to the Corinthian church.  
Reading from the Message. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church in Chapter 12

What I want to talk about now is the various ways God’s Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, 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. For instance, by using your heads, you know perfectly well that the Spirit of God would never prompt anyone to say “Jesus be damned!” Nor would anyone be inclined to say “Jesus is Master!” without the insight of the Holy Spirit.

4–11 God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!

The variety is wonderful: wise counsel clear understanding simple trust healing the sick miraculous acts proclamation distinguishing between spirits tongues interpretation of tongues.  
All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.

12–13 You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body. It’s exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which *he* has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

14–18 I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn’t just a single part blown up into something huge. It’s all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, “I’m not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don’t belong to this body,” would that make it so? If Ear said, “I’m not beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don’t deserve a place on the head,” would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

19–24 But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a *part* of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn’t be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, “Get lost; I don’t need you”? Or, Head telling Foot, “You’re fired; your job

has been phased out”? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the “lower” the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it’s a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes *no* difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn’t you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

<sup>25–26</sup> The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don’t, the parts we see and the parts we don’t. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

<sup>27–31</sup> You are Christ’s body—that’s who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your “part” mean anything. You’re familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his “body”: apostles prophets teachers miracle workers healers helpers organizers those who pray in tongues.

But it’s obvious by now, isn’t it, that Christ’s church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, unidimensional Part? It’s not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called “important” parts.

Even in the midst of dissent and conflict and fear and frustration - we are all connected – intimately – into the body of Christ. More, specifically, we ARE the body of Christ – every last one of us – our gifts – our personality – our very being is essential to the health of the body.

It is God’s Spirit who formed this body from the earth, who fills it with rich lifeblood from the vine, who lights it on fire by energizing and invigorating it, and then gives it the breath of life. **Every part** of this body at Menno and the body of Christ in the world is necessary for the body’s survival.

The more I think of it, the more I come to understand that the Spirit not only moves through people – but also through people. If we think of the Church as a unified body – not a human, but a tree, then the spirit moving THROUGH the body can become easier to understand.

The roots of the Menno tree are our anchors – with wisdom they apply what they know of scripture and faith to life situations. They remain alive and supple even in winter and they drink deeply from the Spirit – the rich wells of living water flowing in the stream of the river of life. They anchor the tree through windstorms and, even if the trunk and branches and leaves are cut from the tree, the roots can still send out shoots – and the tree can grow again. Who are our anchors? Who are our roots? Look around today – and think about it this week. Roots aren’t necessarily seniors – we even have some kids or youth that have great potential for rootedness.

The trunk and branches of the Menno tree are those who are stalwart and committed - regardless of the cost. You know who they are. They’re here at every meeting and volunteer for as much as possible. Why? Because they know that if the tree is to survive then ALL parts need to be fed. The trunk and branches connect the roots to the leaves. They are conduits of the Spirit – the spirit moves through them effortlessly through their words AND deeds. Not only are they conduits but they are flexible enough to bend with the wind and sturdy enough to point the tree in the direction it needs to go. Who are the trunk

and branches? Look around today – and think about it this week. Branches aren't only the ones who are young enough to serve on a committee or old enough to serve on a committee. We have some seniors and some young folk who love God and the body of Christ.

The canopy consists of those whose dreams and ideas fuel the rest of us to get going. They have the ability to see the larger picture and invite others to rest in their shade. The canopy produces blooms, leaves and fruit all in their season taking nourishment from the SON. The tree is known for its fruit – and the fruit fulfills its purpose by leaving the tree. Each fruit has the potential of starting another tree. Leaves rustle in the wind of the Spirit as they take in the light of God and synthesize it into food for the tree – all the while producing clean spaces for others to live healthy and whole lives. At the end of the long, lonely winter, when they are just starting to relive again, they are fed the good clean living water stored in the roots and carried to them from the trunk and branches. Who are the leaves and fruit and blossoms? Look around today and think about it this week. Leaves and fruit and blossoms aren't only the young ones with lots of energy – but could be any one of us with dreams and visions and hopes for the Kingdom of God.

EVERY PART of the tree is important for the health of the tree. If one part of the tree is damaged or diseased – you will see evidence of the disease in what it produces – namely its leaves and fruit. Without the roots the tree would tip over and fall. The canopy would not receive the healing energy marking the arrival of spring even in the midst of winter – no leaf-buds pushing out, no fruit or flower and eventually the trunk would dry up and crack and break. Without the trunk – the sap wouldn't flow from leaf to root and back and, well, there wouldn't actually be a tree. Without the leaves the trunk and roots wouldn't receive the good food – the sun transferred to energy and sent down the trunk to the roots - needed to survive and thrive through all seasons. Without the canopy the tree would not have fruit and not only would no one come and sit under her cool shade, but there would be no little saplings springing up to join the forest.

If the trunk is scabby and cranky – does that make it any less part of the tree? If the leaves are small and the fruit sparse, does that mean the tree should be cut down? If the roots are long winded and spindly, should we bring the ax and match? NO!

No. We provide water for the roots – and cover them with nutritious mulch. We cleanly prune diseased and superfluous branches – so that the tree can focus its attention on producing healthy leaves and good fruit. When all parts of the tree are healthy, it will grow in strength and joy and God's spirit will flow through that tree like sap and make it strong. This tree will be known for its delicious fruit - Fruit that will last. Where do you see yourself in the metaphor of the tree? Where do you see yourself in the metaphor of the body?

Of course the metaphors can only go so far – but these do help us and remind us that we need each other. God's spirit gives us and sustains in us the gifts and talents and resources that are necessary for the health AND for the witness of the congregation.

Menno is a tree growing deep in the goodness of God's Garden. Menno is a body of Christ. God's spirit is our lifeblood, the food we eat, the air we breathe, our thoughts, our hopes our actions and our dreams. God's spirit empowers enlivens refreshes and grounds us.

What is God's spirit calling forth in you?