First United Methodist Church

Springboro, Ohio

Rev. Dr. Suzanne Allen

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“What Kind of Legacy?”

We are in the season of focusing on the Holy Spirit and growing deeper in our faith. Over the last few weeks we’ve talked about the Holy Spirit as our coach, as wise counselor, and as the breath that fills us and connects us to the life purpose and mission of Jesus.

This week, we turn to the writings of Paul. He adds another layer to this job description of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is one who gives us gifts for that mission of Jesus. The Spirit is not only the giver of these gifts, but the one who gives the instructions that help us to use them effectively for God’s purposes.

It is a good day to talk about gifts since it is a day of gift giving. We are thinking of our fathers and giving them the gift of our appreciation even as we think of all the gifts they have given us in life: the gift of life itself, of providing the resources for daily life, for teaching us and laughing with us and playing with us.

We might talk about these gifts as our father’s legacy. The gifts we receive well, grow in and use well are the positive legacy we pass on. They are a key component of the impact we make on the world. On this father’s day, I invite you to remember and give thanks for the particular spiritual gifts of your father and to think about how you can grow in them and pass them on to others.

We do have a choice though. Some have chosen to hoard the gifts given to them as possessions rather than tools. They have wasted their gifts or used them for harm rather than good. Their legacy is not so positive. But the good news is that we are a people of grace who worship a God of grace. God heals us and teaches us even in difficult situations and grows the gift of compassion within us even when others around us make choices to leave a negative legacy.

The church at Corinth is struggling with its gifts and its legacy. Paul assures them that they have been given spiritual gifts in their community. These are a result of their faith in Jesus as their Lord. They have been given these gifts for the good of the community, so that they can serve Jesus Christ together and make an impact in the world for him.

The problem is that they are not appreciating all of the spiritual gifts. They have created a hierarchy of privilege within the gifts. And those who have been given the most popular gifts think of them as theirs rather than being entrusted to them for the good of all. They brag and put others down, and use the gifts for their own benefit rather than for all.

So Paul offers them this image of the body with all of its parts working together. He invites them to see their gifts of the Spirit as those that are so abundant and amazing that they must be shared. They are given to one, but they are for all.

Today, even as we think of the legacy our own biological and spiritual fathers have passed on to us, I invite you to think about your legacy. What are the spiritual gifts you have been given? As you leave a legacy, what are the top items on the list that you want to pass on? Do they match up with how you spend your time and resources? Are there things that you want to make sure not to pass on? What do you need to do to accomplish these things?

As you consider your legacy, I want to invite you to think about a few qualities that Paul lifts up in this passage and challenge you to make them a part of your legacy.

The first is ***a strong foundation of faith***. None of this, Paul says, happens without faith. It makes a significant difference to be able to claim, “Jesus Christ is Lord” and to build your life on this foundation. Your identity is different. Your priorities are different. Your worship is different. Your attitude is different. Your legacy is different because of your faith. You do not get caught up in worshiping the idols and distractions of the world.

It is different because suddenly your legacy isn’t just about you or from you. It is from God. You are gaining wisdom and growing in faith and godliness. God’s grace is working on you, filling you and flowing through you. When you are seeking to live the claim that “Jesus Christ is Lord,” you become a conduit of God’s grace.

This may sound simple, like one of those duh things. But it involves a shift of ego and focus. Jesus is Lord, not me. He’s my boss and my guide through all of life’s situations.

It’s the legacy of a humble heart. When you have a humble heart, you are open to God and others rather than closed. Grace and love can get to you and flow from you so much easier. You realize that you are not all alone in life. It’s not all about you and it’s not all on you. You are part of the body of Christ.

This is so important because thinking you are all alone or that you have to do it all alone is crippling. So many in our day think they have to do it all by themselves, to be perfect. They don’t let others in. They don’t let God in. They crumble under that weight. They become resentful and angry, looking for someone to blame. Sometimes it’s others, sometimes self. Regardless, relationships suffer and our legacy turns negative.

We were made as people for community. We need God and we need each other. This is the second quality of a positive legacy that Paul challenges us to—***to share and grow in our gifts in a Spirit filled healthy community.*** Being in community isn’t always easy. People are not perfect and therefore community isn’t perfect. Being in community challenges our patience and our ego often, especially when it’s a diverse community of beliefs and ages and backgrounds. It often seems easier to just walk away from family, from church, from friends. It’s easier to seek refuge by isolating ourselves or by finding an unhealthy community that reinforces our ways of thinking and acting that are harmful to us and others.

When I think of all of the situations of horrible violence that have taken place in our country recently, especially that in South Carolina this weekend, as I rack my brain and pray over these situations, it seems to me that the only way to make it through this sort of tragedy and to change the future, is to take these words of Paul on being a community that values all and works together despite differences seriously.

It means learning what healthy community looks like--where everyone is safe, accepted, and loved, but has to follow the rules of healthy community so that others are not harmed. It means learning how to speak the truth in love, at the right time. It means learning to use good manners and keep your mouth shut sometimes and to speak up in others. It means dealing with our own stuff rather than transferring it to and blaming the community and others. It means knowing each other well enough to know what’s going on in their heads and their facebook pages. It means not letting anyone, especially our youth and young adults fall through the cracks. It means, as Paul does here, being faithful and focused enough to continue to remind each other of our true focus and mission.

It is in community that we find we are loved despite our imperfections. It is in community that we learn to love others, to tolerate their quirkiness, to forgive and to be forgiven, to value and use and share our gifts for the good of all. It is in community that we laugh and cry and are truly seen and see others.

It is in trusted community that we are reminded who we are, whose we are, and called to use our gifts for the good of all. It is in healthy community built on a foundation of faith.

There are so many things we want to pass on. Certain things we don’t want to pass on. Many things we will unintentionally pass on. But there are some things that are so important that we must be intentional about passing them on. These are the things of the Spirit, the gifts God has given us as his children, treasures to care for, nurture, and pass on as a legacy.