

“Energizers”

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

As you all know, I was greeted on my first Sunday here by a frigid sanctuary following an early morning phone call from my wife telling me our house in Florida had no heat. The next Sunday I went to West Palm Beach where I was greeted by cold weather as I led a funeral outdoors. So let me suggest a few pointers on how we can keep warm in church:

- Invite your friends to crowd into a pew.
- Seat yourself near the pulpit; much hot air is emitted from that area.
- Wait for an unfamiliar hymn, and then watch the sparks fly!
- Let the Spirit of God warm your heart if not always your body.

I grew up in a singing church where I felt my heart warmed even on a chilly morning. We had no choir in that little white church in the wildwood, so everyone did their part. I noticed in the hymnals that the notes had different shapes, and as I listened to the men around me singing, I figured out what shaped notes I could follow. I'd listen to the harmonies throughout the congregation as they would bend a little in order to blend together, and I found it energizing!

A hundred years ago, my experience was more the norm for most churches. Congregations both large and small sang in 4-part harmony. Today, almost every congregational hymn is sung to the melody except for

perhaps the choir and a few brave souls with a pretty good ear or who have had some musical training.

So, what happened? Well, no one knows. 1) Some think that when choirs began to take on a larger role in worship, congregational harmony became less important. Congregations began to view harmony as something best left to the rehearsed. But others point out that years ago, 2) hymnals were in short supply, so members relied on listening to each other to sing along, like I did. There was a time (and this sanctuary is itself a testimony to that era) when sons sat with fathers and daughters sat with mothers and learned their parts respectively. But when hymnals became plentiful and the organ could pump out the melody for all to hear, people didn't depend on each other as much. They didn't need to sit together as much, either. They could sing on their own any way they wanted to.

In this morning's scripture, the apostle Paul is speaking to a church filled with people singing to their own tunes, with little harmony to be heard. Some had come from pagan backgrounds where they believed in many spirits and had carried over into the church the belief that spiritual gifts were given to an individual for his or her exclusive use. This led Paul to offer the image of one body with many parts, one Spirit, many gifts.

I believe Paul would have approved as well of the idea of many voices with different parts united in one song in one Spirit. He would applaud the commitment and work of the choir bending different voices into a common blend. At the same time, Paul would urge the whole church to be energized in the same way by the Spirit,

celebrating differing gifts and kinds of service that work for the common good.

I use the word “energized” intentionally. In the biblical Greek, you find a word used here from which we derive the word “energy”. Literally, Paul presents a God who *energizes* all the spiritual gifts in us by the one Spirit.

This leads us to a transformative question: what energizes you for Christ? Answering this question is important both to you and your church. This is why this scripture is often used for the ordination of officers. This is why your Stewardship & Generosity Team asks you to fill out a Commitment to Ministry Inventory. If you are energized by serving, we want you to serve. If you are energized by giving, we want you to give. If you are energized by singing, then we want you to sing – all to the glory of God!

John Calvin, the “Father of Presbyterianism” was big on singing in worship. For one, he saw the use of our voices as a sign of God’s grace and glory. Second, singing, along with preaching the gospel, was a means by which the Spirit energizes our lives to serve Christ. This is why Calvin was also big on participation. This is why it’s so important for you to identify your “energizers” if you haven’t already. There is nothing more energizing than to do what you have the gift and passion to do as God may determine, and do it with others who warm the same pew beside you, hear the same Word, sing the same songs – even if sometimes there are too many verses to your liking – and share the same Spirit that warms our hearts, if not always our bodies.