

One God Who Moves the Whole World
Sermon for the Monday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11



⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He will.

At some point, a small being managed to reach the human bloodstream and reproduce there. We can't see this being with the naked eye. Nevertheless, it spread its inconvenience throughout the entire world so that many people died, the economy became paralyzed, and people in the whole world had to hide themselves in their houses. It all began with a small invisible being that today we call Corona. We are better able to understand the exponential spread of this small being today, even if we can't see it. The rapid spread of the virus showed us that there are things in the world that we can't see or understand but can still have far-reaching consequences. The story of God and mankind is similar. We can neither see nor understand God. And yet, we can see, feel, and marvel at the consequences of His actions every day and every minute. It all begins with a Word. God spoke and it started to pulsate! Animals, plants, fish, everything stirred because God spoke. The movement that came from God's Word can continually be seen throughout the whole story of God with mankind. No matter if it was the entire people of Israel or one single saint! When God speaks, movement comes! Yes, the Bible knows no saints who just hide in the desert or in a quiet little room to stare at their bellybutton. That's why it's also no

wonder that the story of Jesus on earth is an powerful movement of people. At first, they come to get to know Jesus and then they go into all the world to spread this Gospel. Exactly like at the first creation, the story of Jesus is an powerful movement that suddenly started and to this day, is still broadcast and changes people. And at the same time, it's absolutely clear that the movement from the Gospel happens entirely without force or an agenda. The entire movement comes only because God touches the hearts of people and they move! When the Gospel reaches the hearts of the people, the person can't stay still. A person is freed from Satan and becomes an entirely new creature! And that's not something to put you to sleep, rather it knocks your socks off! Freed from the chains of Satan, people find living faith in God. They are freed from death. And at the same time, also freed from the chains of despair and hopelessness. What so moves people is not the spirit or will of a person, rather God's Spirit. That's why it is impossible for us to produce, to overpower, or to change the agenda of the Spirit of God in any way. Every time when we try, the pulsating life, that we have gotten to know from the Bible and God, stagnates.

In our sermon text today, we meet people who have tried just that. It all started so well. At Pentecost, God easily broke through the boundaries of language so that the people could understand the speech of the apostles in their own language. Furthermore, since this time, there was the gift of speaking in tongues in the church. Speaking in tongues was not always so understandable like at the time of Pentecost. Sometimes, it was a prayer in an incomprehensible language that no one could understand. This type of speaking in tongues could be summarized like this: What the person could no longer express what was on his mind, he expressed through a foreign prayer language. I imagine this prayer language something like this: In prayer and in praise of God, our dry words often appear much too little and much too needy to express what we want to say. And that's why there was this prayer language that connected people with God. For the one who prayed, it was like being freed from the constraints of the mind and consequently feeling a very special closeness to God. Today, there are many things with us in the Church that are comparable to this speaking in tongues. Whoever sings does exactly what the first speakers of tongues did. Where proper words are no longer enough to praise God, we may sing. Therefore, not only the mind is brought into motion, but the entire person is involved when singing. We also do the same by performing a play about the Biblical story. Sometimes people can also express their praise through a dance. But we may not force all these gifts that God gives us. That's exactly what the first Christians in Corinth did. Very quickly, speaking in tongues became a tradition with these people. And not just tradition. It got even worse. The people valued speaking in tongues as a special gift to hold above other normal Christians or to make something special of themselves. The Corinthians made a foundational mistake at this moment that contradicts the Bible. From the first pages of the Bible, it is clear that God's love radiates from the Word and wants to reach people. What the Corinthians did, goes exactly in the other direction. They captured God's love and nicely packed it up for themselves... Just for their own use! And just for their own pleasure! If we do this with God's Spirit, we mustn't be surprised when the best gifts of God are turned into their opposite and no longer become a blessing but a curse. This is exactly what happened with the Corinthians. There was division in the congregation. The congregation itself could no longer convince the non-Christians because they couldn't do anything with speaking in tongues anyway. The community of God consequently lost the radiance that God had given them. Dear congregation: I ask myself, if we also aren't constantly in danger of repeating the mistakes of the Corinthians. There are so many beautiful spiritual gifts that God has given us. We have also received so many blessed Christian songwriters and preachers. But what if all that is just for our own pleasure? We mustn't wonder then when the beautiful gifts that God gives us, freeze.

And we can also no longer sing about God's great deeds ourselves. The living faith that moves hearts and makes us sing and dance, becomes an immovable concrete block from which no one can become happy!

The apostle Paul wants to free the Corinthians from this concrete block. Similarly, the apostle Paul also wants to free us from this concrete block today. And for that, we only ever need one thing. That is the living Word of God, which can create life out of nothing. God's Word, which created the world, is the only thing that can free us from the many concrete walls with which we have walled ourselves up. Paul proclaims this exact Word against the touchy-feely emotions, with which the Corinthians had lost their way. They lost themselves in the emotions of speaking in tongues. And had no room for God's Word. Instead of staring at our own bellybuttons and looking for more and better things in our own hearts, Paul urges us to stand under God's Word. And whoever is freed by God in this way, can't be satisfied with just becoming happy themselves. No, the Word that strikes us in the heart wants to go out. Wants to reach others. And it is completely unimportant if the person to whom I speak God's Word has my taste and my culture or not. God's Word frees me so that out of the pure joy and love, which God has placed in my heart, I meet others where they are. I can also understand and accept others as they are because of God. And when I notice that another Christian is enlightened with completely different gifts than I am, I don't look suspiciously or jealously at him. Rather, I am excited with him. I can reflect God with organ, wind instruments, voice, pantomime, and dance. I can do so, not only in my own language, but also in a completely different language. Yes, and if there are other things with which I can praise God and express His love, then I also do that with joy and with an open, light heart. Amen.