

Activate!
Pentecost
June 8, 2014
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Text: I Corinthians 12

Alright – in recognition of Emma and Stephen and Isaac making profession of faith today, I am going to begin with an illustration from an animated cartoon series – not to say that as teenagers I think they’re necessarily watching cartoons, but it’s just perhaps a bit more youth-accessible way to begin than starting by exegeting some Greek – which I’ll get to later! But in case you think I am going to try to show my coolness to these youth by using a current cartoon example, I will instead show my uncoolness by referring to a cartoon series from the 70’s. Emma and Stephen and Isaac, have you ever heard of the Super Friends? – they were superheroes who were all part of the Justice League: Superman - Wonder Woman - Aquaman... usually saving the world from the Legion of Doom. And what was exciting as a kid was then there was also the Junior Justice League, some teen superhero helpers, including the Wonder Twins – have you heard of them?

Well – I’m telling you – this past week as soon as Pastor Jill saw my sermon title: “Activate!” – the first thing she said was: ‘Wonder Twin powers - activate!’ And that’s because that’s what the Wonder Twins did – they were a brother and sister who could transform, the brother Zan into any form of water and the sister Jayna into any animal – but to do so they had to do kind of a fist bump together and say “Wonder Twin powers – activate!” – ‘form of ice; form of an eagle’. It wasn’t quite clear how this super power was really so helpful in defeating the legion of doom – but it was somehow. And younger folks like Pastor Jill and older folks like me remember that.

Alright – so – I Corinthians 12:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

I have to say, I've been kind of cracking myself up this week, thinking that as you made profession of faith today, that at the conclusion of the blessing I would say: 'Holy Spirit powers – activate!' ...but I didn't. But you see, that word 'activate' is there – and it caught my attention as interesting – it's there in the verses I just read: 'the same God who ACTIVATES them all in everyone' – and again later in v. 11: 'all these are ACTIVATED by the one Spirit' Well, what does that mean? that you're just kind of going along in life – and then, let's say, you make profession of faith, and suddenly: ACTIVATE! – the gifts of God's Spirit spring up in your life?

Well, no, it's not an all at once 'Holy Spirit powers - activate!' thing - but I think this word 'ACTIVATE' is worth paying attention to. The word is translated from the Greek, and it's the word 'energeo' – which, maybe you can hear, is the root for the word 'energy' – 'energeo' - or 'energize'. So it's expressing the idea that God's presence in the Spirit is not a passive thing, but the Spirit is directly the source, the energy, the activity that brings the gifts of God alive. But there's another thing interesting about this word too – because what activate, or energize, tells us, is that these gifts are not something outside of us that God brings to us – no, they are part of who you are, that becomes active, energized in you. This is the Spirit stirring up, activating something of how you were made by God as a human being.

So that means that this “activate” business is a combination of God and you. This is not just God doing something to you, with you as a passive bystander; and this is not just you doing something, with God out there somewhere as an inspirational force.

It is a combination of our God who is with us - the Spirit of the Risen Christ; and of you, as you embrace the story of Jesus as a story that shapes your life. So I think what that activating/energizing looks like and feels like, is when our faith opens us to God shaping us into the kind of person we were really made to be – the gift of how God made you to be, becoming fully active in you. So what is that activate/energizing like? – well: sometimes that will feel like joy, the kind of deep joy in life that is a sense of gratitude for the blessing of life God gives; sometimes that will feel like freedom, as you're able to untangle yourself from some of the negative messages and patterns that our world tries to trap us in, or able to freely and fully use the way God has made you to bless others; sometimes it will feel like comfort, as you get a sense of God's love holding you in difficult times; sometimes it will feel like passion, as you find something that matters in life and you are a part of making that happen. And you see – that's already how God made you, created you, to live – with joy and gratitude and trust and passion; but those things can get pushed down, dimmed in us; and so God had a grand idea – in the story of Jesus, his life and death and resurrection, and ascension and gift of the Spirit – in Christ to activate/energize, to breathe new life to how God created you to be.

That is good – but I wonder, does that somehow make us different, or better than others – to have a faith that is blessed with such gifts? No – it doesn't – but it seems an important question to raise because somehow faith is often talked about in that way, dividing things into us and them, good or bad. But what your profession of faith today is about, Stephen and Emma and Isaac, is simply a witness to who God is and who God made you to be – and that is a witness that connects you: connects you more deeply to God, to your true self, AND to others, to be a blessing with God's gifts in your life. This Corinthians passage says that God is at work in each of us 'for the common good' - which describes your faith and God's gifts as a way of

blessing others. What you are a part of is claiming a very important truth in life: that as God activates your gifts, as God's Spirit energizes you to live as you were made to live, that has a way of activating God's gifts in others – use your gifts (those things energized from God that ARE you!) and God will use those for good.

I sometimes wonder, where is God and how is God at work in the world? I hear people wonder that = perhaps you do too. And then, today, I get a very clear answer: look at Emma – Stephen – Isaac; God has energized in them a faith that calls them to live as God created them to – God has activated their gifts to bless others. God makes a difference in this world through you – makes it a better place – that's pretty amazing – God at work in this world in a powerful way.

Ok – so – Stephen and Isaac and Emma – 1 more thing about the Wonder Twins! – they could only activate their powers if they were together – doing the fist bump thing; if they were separated, they were powerless (although actually, they could get help from their space monkey Glick – but we won't get into that!). But you see where I'm going with this, right? The gifts of God are not something for us to have in isolation - we are part of community of faith – together the Spirit is at work in us, and our gifts are shared as a blessing. Here at Hope Church you can see the Spirit active among us – there are many gifts for you to see in people around you and be blessed by in this community; but probably life will take you beyond Hope Church – and then we want you to know that the Spirit goes with you, and wherever life leads, the Holy Spirit will keep calling you to be part of a community energized by the life God gives in Jesus Christ; and God will continue to activate your gifts as a blessing to others – which sounds like a pretty super power to me. AMEN.