

Unity, Diversity, Interdependence, One Body, January 27th 2019.

1 Corinthians 12:7- 13:3 - but main focus on 12:12-31a

Also reference to Luke 4:14-21.

Are there pieces of music you find yourself going back to on Spotify or a video on Youtube or any other suitable music app? One of mine is from the UK. It is from the Royal Albert Hall in London - the Film Proms - and a section led by the orchestra a James Bond melody, about 12 minutes. I love the music. But I love watching the filming, as the cameras move around and you see the beauty of the orchestra. How multiple musicians play in sync, and the movements of violinists, those playing flute cello, etc. The beauty of a group working together. Now on that video, there are the comments, people make and one guy mentioned how the guy with the electronic guitar had to wait the whole 10 minutes, in that set, before playing. Why an electronic guitar in an orchestra well you need to know James Bond. But again, those musicians who play most of the pieces in that melody, know they also need those who contribute at key points and yet some didn't play the whole sound would be so much poorer.

Paul uses a very similar idea to an orchestra. As Jasper read, we heard Paul use one of the brilliant and memorable images of the entire Bible - the church as the body of Christ, a body in which the members, though many, are one.' ((Stephen Farris quoted in Van Harn, *The Lectionary Commentary: Acts and the Epistles*, p 207). Now this comparison between a group and using the image of 'the body' was not new. It was used in Greek and Roman teaching. However, when it was used in Greece, it was to urge people of lower classes to stay in their places and not disturb things, not get involved, observe only, do not contribute. As George Orwell wrote, at the end of the novel *Animal Farm*,

the animals see written. 'All are equal but some are more equal than others.'

Paul uses 'the body' differently. Yes there is diversity of culture, race, background, employment in a church, he says. But there are no groups who are disregarded. In fact we are taught we need diversity in the body, we need all the gifts expressed, we need all involved using the gifts given by the grace of God, and Paul adds, we are interdependent - *we need each other's gifts*.

Unity he begins with. Paul says - "for we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body". A writer said: 'A primary work of the Spirit to link believers together into one body of Christ - which is what the church is.' (Farris, *ibid.*, p.208). We are linked together. But also, we are bound into a unity with the crucified and risen Lord. We are *his* body. As Paul writes elsewhere. " he is the head of the Body, the church" (Colossian 1:18). That unity we hold with our Lord - we are *his* Body - is profoundly stated, as remembered by Paul himself, when he travelled on the road to Damascus: "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9) Paul was not attacking Jesus. He had never met Jesus. He was persecuting the followers of Jesus. The Body. And Jesus declares - as Paul persecutes these believers, he is persecuting *him*. We are the Body of Christ.

United in one Body, united with Christ, his Body. And the Spirit that was upon Jesus, the Spirit in whom he returned in power from his temptations, (Luke 4), that Spirit we have been given to drink. Note Paul carefully says - we were all baptized into one Body - we were all given the One Spirit to drink. If we accept that we are part of the Body of Christ, we are given the one Spirit to drink. It is a vivid image. "Jesus had said -

"If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within in. By this he meant the Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive." (John 7).

To drink suggests the Spirit is given in abundance to the community - he is within us to receive from, for all he wants to give us, say to us, work in us, gift us.

Yet in this unity. Paul talks about the need for diversity. The Body is diverse by the design of God. As we see a diverse world the Lord has created, his Body is diverse. We heard at the start of the reading:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good...v7.

Then a few verses later. All these gifts are the work of the one and same Spirit and he gives them to each one just as he determines.(v11)

Again. ... But God in fact has arranged the parts in the Body every one of them, just as he wanted them to be (v18).

And finally at the end (vv27-31):

"Now you are the Body of Christ and each one of you is part of it. And in the church God has appointed... first... second... third... then, also those having gifts..."

We are hearing that each of us, are member of the Body, each of us has been gifted spiritually by God by his Spirit. We hear that we should accept gratefully and gracefully whatever gifts God

has given to us and use them for the benefit of the church community.

Consider our parents and godparents. Many of you here today are godparents as well as parents. We saw Annalyne and Bram stand here, and Jasper, Dorothee and Roger. 5 individuals. Or are they like the orchestra? God will have gifted each of you differently through his Spirit. Your gifts to be used for the benefit of the church community. And one way is using your gifts to benefit Rafael who is part of this church. To help him grow up into a follower of Christ. Each of you will approach this differently. And each of your different gifts are needed - God has called you into this role - all the gifts of all 5 of you, to help Rafael to grow up to follow Jesus.

Just a word on gifts. As we heard last week, the gifts Paul lists are not an exhaustive list. There are other spiritual gifts - some expressing themselves very naturally others supernaturally. For example Romans 12 lists other spiritual gifts.

For some people, we may know how God has gifted us. For others we are not sure how he has, and so wonder how we can serve. This is one of the beauties of community. To be a place of affirmation and encouragement. To share feedback when people do well. I remember a few Sundays after All Saints was born, a couple of guys here at church - Dutch guys - said, if we - meaning the average Dutch Christian - don't say anything, it is going fine! Do you recognise that. But if we never say anything, then we may not be sure how God brings fruit through our service and therefore how he seeks to use us in All Saints. So I long for us to continue growing as a church that we can share encouragements with each other, how we are serving the Lord and how we see the Lord bringing fruit in what we do. As we feedback, then

people become clearer where and how they can serve - how we can use the graces of God in the ways he intends.

Paul in v14-20 has focused on diversity. Now he moves to interdependence. The Archbishop of the Church of England, Justin Welby, a week ago, was interviewed by a Christian radio channel and shared. I'm quoting from the interview.

Welby said: "In my own prayer life, and as part of my daily discipline I pray in tongues every day - not as an occasional thing, but as part of daily prayer." He went on to say how he has also been encouraged by those words of knowledge and prophecy. "I expect to hear from God through other people with words of knowledge or prophecies - some of which I am unsure about, others I can sense there being something of the Spirit of God." He warned against "the danger of putting 'charismatic' as a tribal category within the church", saying that "all Christians are filled with the Spirit, so every Christian is a charismatic in that sense."

link to interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAUAftNbR00>

Now what Archbishop Welby said, maybe a surprise to some, but there are many clergy and non clergy I have met, know, trained with, prayed with, who pray in tongues. The key thing the Archbishop drew out. He has his own gifts by the Spirit. But he says he expected to hear through words of knowledge or prophecies through *other people*. He did not say he has all the gifts. Or he did not need others as he is an Archbishop. No, he knew the graces God had given him, and he needs the working of other gifts, and he would discern what people shared. A perfect example of the Body. This is more than simply unity and diversity. There is here *interdependence*. Like the orchestra, for

those particular pieces, those cornets and trumpets were needed, that electric guitar. So Paul it isn't teaching us just about church being about diverse gifts, it is about how a congregation needs those gifts being used.

Paul teaches unity as a Body and in the Spirit, diversity and interdependence. Throughout the passage, he says that believers are not all the same. But then he says it - there is to be sameness: "the only 'sameness' in the church Paul is saying, is in the depth of mutual concern among its members. In a church both suffering and honor are shared among the members. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it." v26.

As many gathered here for Rafael's baptism, as there are many here connected and related, it is worth considering - you rejoice with those who rejoice - you are here and celebrate. But also I know you would suffer with those suffer, you would stand alongside, grieve alongside a family member. As we may do that for human family - Paul says: we are part of a Christian family - Now here, it was the image of a Body he used, elsewhere we are taught how we are brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, we aren't really taught. Paul regularly just calls believers - adelphoi - brothers, sisters. In those times, in Jewish belief, in Greek belief, family mattered. Blood ties were very important. And Paul regularly calls believers - brothers - related. We are kin. That is one of the striking things in the NT. As we treat human family, we are to treat our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I want to focus, to close, on "one part suffers, whole body suffers." Here at All Saints this is something we take seriously. The organisation Open Doors, which we support through giving in our charitable basket, through our praying through last year

and start of this year for persecuted believers. Here Paul says - sameness - they suffer, you suffer with them; they rejoice, you rejoice. So we seek to stand alongside by praying, giving, to grieve at what persecuted believers go through. There are a few ways for us to do this.

One is both Open Doors Netherlands and Open Doors UK have many online resources, stories, testimonies and information how to inform, how to give, pray, speak out for.

Links are:

www.opendoorsuk.org

www.opendoors.nl

Secondly, is that Open Doors have developed a free prayer app, which will give you regular up to date prayer needs for persecuted believers.

Link is:

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/prayerapp/>

Thirdly, in a few weeks, we are going to have some printed resources for adults, and youth in the church 11 upwards, to give you some ways to pray in the coming year, to stand alongside those who grieve.

As physically a part of the body when hurting affects the human body, then be that is to be true of the Body of Christ.

So an orchestra. The beauty that is created as the diverse gifts in that orchestra are used. Some giftings are used a lot, some are common, other perhaps not as common, used less often, but at key times. Yet no one in that orchestra is redundant. They are all necessary. And they need each other's sounds - each other's gifts. If some musicians do not play well, they all suffer and grieve; if they do well, they rejoice!

Paul you could say looks and says:

""Be what you are." The church is the Body of Christ. Now live up to that reality." Stephen Farris, *ibid.*, p.209.

Shall we pray.