



Revd Ro's Reflection on The 2nd Sunday after Epiphany 2022 Year C

1 Corinthians 12. 1-11

John 2. 1-11

We have been looking at Acts and Ephesians, now our New Testament reading is from Corinthians. It is a long time since we have looked at Paul's letters to the Corinthians so it is perhaps best to remind ourselves about Corinth. Corinth was a Greek city port about 65 miles to the west of Athens. In 146 BC it was destroyed by the Romans but was rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC and established as a Roman colony. It was a cosmopolitan port and the cult of Emperor Worship flourished there. It was into this mix then that Paul came on his second missionary journey and established the church there in around AD 50. It is important to remember the background of these new Christians and the behaviour and worship of gods that they had been used to.

Paul was in Ephesus when he received news from Chloe and her people about the church in Corinth ¹¹'For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.' (1 Corinth 1.11) The Corinthian church was forming factions, some saying they followed Paul, some Apollos, a Christian teacher who had witnessed in Corinth, some Peter and others Jesus. Of course this is ridiculous, they are simply following the practise of the various teachers and intellectuals and philosophers in the city who demanded their own disciples. The Church of Jesus Christ is one; Christian teachers are not rivals; they witness to Jesus Christ as the one Lord and to God as one God in three persons. All who witness in his name are members of Jesus Christ and speak for him.

There were other problems too regarding jealousies, rivalry, and immoral behaviour. It is easy to think that the newly established churches were idyllic and had got it right, that they all lived according to the observation, 'See how these Christians love one another' of course this wasn't always so. They were human and from very different backgrounds with very different standards of behaviour. Paul still has a lot to teach them and they have a lot to learn. His letter to the Corinthians was written from Ephesus.

The passage this week is inextricably linked to next week's passage, one of Paul's most famous, so I will be referring to it as a write. Paul may have some tough things to say to these wayward Corinthians but he says it in love and he needs to teach them of the ways of Jesus and of the behaviour that is expected of Christians, so different from the ways they have been accustomed to and the behaviour they see all around them. Always Paul focuses on prayer and the fact that he prays for them in love and in Jesus' name.

^{12.1} 'Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.'

The old ways, the old practises, the worship of idols is over, it is past, and those ways must be put behind. The new way is very different. They have accepted Jesus Christ, King of the cosmos. Jesus came to the Jews initially but the Messiah will rule the world and at his second coming will preside over God's perfected creation. Now these people have accepted Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, they confess God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. That Spirit was given to those first followers in the upper room and that same Spirit is with them now. Those words 'Jesus is Lord' are so central to the Christian faith. We confess Jesus as our Lord at our baptism as Christians have always done. Here in this cosmopolitan city of Corinth, with the Romans in charge, the expected and required confession was Caesar is Lord. Emperor Worship demanded it. Christians cannot confess that, when someone says, 'Jesus is Lord' they are basically saying 'Caesar is not' indeed many Christians were to die because of this. But it is the central fact all Christians confess, one Lord Jesus Christ, think of the Creed, the confession of faith which Christians have repeated for centuries, 'I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ.' That confession, says Paul, is motivated by the Holy Spirit.

Paul goes on to look at attributes and gifts that people possess, he is being clear, one gift is not superior to another, one person is not superior to another. We should pause for a moment here and remember that Jesus, who broke the bread and blessed the cup, also washed the feet of twelve poor men. Service is important. I remember when I was ordained deacon in Lichfield Cathedral I and all those to be ordained were presented with a simple white towel to remind us of this and that we were called to serve. Indeed we are all called to serve in whatever capacity. St Paul is quite clear,

⁴ 'Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and 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.'

The central point is that there is nothing clever or superior about being able to do something, all gifts are God given. Each person has their own God given talents. I enjoy watching 'The Repair Shop' and wonder at the way the experts can restore objects that have so much love in them. Of course these experts have only become so by talent and years of apprenticeship and years of hard work. Whatever gift we have is God given and it is incumbent upon us to use it for good. These 'gifts', to which Paul is referring, can cause feelings of superiority in people but that will not do. That is not the way the church must function, not then and not now. Every member ministry is really the way to

achieve harmony. No one is better or more important than anyone else. The gifts are not superior, they are God given. So Paul illustrates this by looking at the various attributes within the church,

⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.'

To begin with we all have something of value to contribute and as Paul points out it is 'for the common good'. The church needs all manner of gifts to operate smoothly. One has a gift very different to another but vital. He illustrates his point by looking at some necessary gifts, preaching, teaching, are central but it is good to look at others; healing, miracles, speaking in tongues and interpretation. All are given with and through the Holy Spirit. They are God's gift to us and we need to discern the gifts within ourselves and then use them as God would have us do in his name.

A church can only function properly, says Paul, if there is no feeling of superiority, no faction and no quarrels. All these things get in the way of what a church should be and those who worship and serve Jesus Christ do so in the best way they can. How can you feel superior about your gifts when all are God given and inspired by the Holy Spirit?

Aside from this of course Paul is saying that you are part of Christ's body. This is how next week's reading which follows on, begins,

¹² 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.'

That is the central point. Jesus died but was raised from the dead and we are one with him and heirs with him. He won new life for us. We who confess him are changed because of this. We are part of Christ; we are part of one another, brothers and sisters in Christ. So when one suffers we all do.

Paul is teaching the church in Corinth these truths and they are true for us. This is the way that Christians must behave. Also there must be no superiority over who they are or their background status. ¹³'For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.' The Jews, the chosen people, are not superior to Gentiles, slaves are not inferior to those who are free. Those man made barriers are dissolved in Christ, all are one in him, equal before God and children of God because all are baptised into the body of Christ.

What we must all do is serve others and serve Jesus. It must be for the good of all. Motivation must not be selfish but as Jesus would want. 'All things come from him and of his own do we give him.'

Our gospel reading is the account of Jesus at the wedding at Cana in Galilee. Last week we looked at the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. We are told that the Spirit came down upon him and a

voice from heaven spoke in affirmation of him. St. John follows this with John, Andrew and Peter joining Jesus and the calling of Philip and Nathanael. John 1:

⁴⁹ 'Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' ⁵¹ And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

Indeed he will see greater things and so if we look at the last line of our gospel reading,

¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Incidentally Cana is Nathanael's village. This is Jesus' first miracle, his miracles are called signs, signs point to something and Jesus' signs always point to God. He acts in God's name and his power, always he prays to God for power and strength he is one with his Father.

So here we see Jesus in a very domestic scene. It is a time of joy and rejoicing. It is important to focus on the fact that Jesus' first miracle is at a time of great joy, at a social event. Jesus is causing happiness. So many times images of Jesus show him as sad or thoughtful but very few show him full of joy and smiling, well he must have been here.

A wedding then as now was a very important event, everyone one in the village would gather. John is very specific, Jesus' disciples had been invited and Mary his mother. We see little of her in the gospels but she has a central role here at this his first miracle.

A wedding nowadays is planned up to two years ahead and often thousands of pounds are spent on it because it is one of the most important events in life. In Jesus' time in the same way, the wedding would be hugely important, a time when nothing must go wrong.

The ceremony would take place in the evening after a feast. At the end of that day the couple would be escorted to their new home in the darkness of night in a torchlight procession, hence the story of the bridesmaids and their lamps. The couple would then remain at home for a week and keep open house. They would wear crowns and be treated like Kings and Queens. In lives that were usually full of poverty, this week of feasting and rejoicing would indeed be wonderful.

We don't know any more details of this wedding except that it appears that Mary may be involved or even have some responsibility, certainly the servants obey her. The catastrophic event of the wine running out would be a deep disgrace to the couple and the family. It is Mary who points this out to Jesus.

³ 'When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴ And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.'

These words of Jesus may seem a stern rebuff but actually 'woman' can be seen as our word lady and the rest as 'leave it to me.' Of course Jesus uses the same word 'woman' to Mary at the crucifixion. This together with, 'My hour has not yet come' and the wine cannot fail to remind us of the wine of the Last Supper and Jesus' words 'This is my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins. That takes us straight to Calvary and Jesus' life outpoured to save humanity.

The next time Mary will be seen in St. John's gospel will be with the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross.

Mary does not doubt here, look at her faith in Jesus,

⁵His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

The instructions are explicit; this is typical of St. John's gospel.

⁶'Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.'

The water would be for the washing of feet as sandals on a dusty or dirty road would necessitate that. The Jewish law demanded that hands were washed before a meal and also between courses. Water would be poured over hands too so they would need a great deal.

'So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.'

The water is now wine, not just wine but the very best. It has been transformed by Jesus. No one would need all that wine – this is about abundance. Jesus transforms the wine here as he transforms it by his words at The Last Supper 'This is my blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.' There is no limit to forgiveness, to love, to the grace of God. Also of course, the transformation applies to us and our lives, to the lives of all Christians. This is St. Paul's point to the Corinthians. Lives are transformed by the acceptance of Jesus. Jesus transforms us if we accept him and follow him by living in his way. Our lives are literally enriched, turned into wine. Not only this, but we should, by our behaviour, take Christ's transforming love to others.

The 'signs' or miracles of Jesus point to God, to the Spirit; they are times when the veil between heaven and earth is very thin. This is what Jesus is saying when he speaks to Nathanael.

Everything is transformed in this story. The couple are not disgraced but full of joy, the disciples believe in him. We should have our lives transformed by the touch of Jesus and take that transforming love to others.

'Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around through my sight and touch and sound in you, and you in me?' John L Bell and Graham Maule

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