



Revd Ro's Reflection on The Third Sunday of Epiphany 2022 Year C

1 Corinthians 12.12-31a
Luke 4.14-21

Our reading from 1 Corinthians is a very famous one and, as I said last week, is linked inextricably to the passage we looked at then, this illustration follows on. This Christmas I thought I had everything sorted, I had prepared for the services I was taking, mum and I had finished dozens of mince pies, mostly gifts, the turkey was on its way and I had even grown the parsley! It was all under control and I would see to it. Until, a pipe in the bathroom started to leak and the hot tap refused to work. Where were my skills then? They were non-existent. Things were in chaos until the plumber came and the world was rosy again. If anything illustrates what St. Paul has to say about gifts and all being interdependent and needed this does!

Let's begin where I left last time. Paul had been talking about God given gifts, through the Holy Spirit.

¹¹ 'All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. ¹²For 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.'

This is so important and the words are familiar to us today, 'by the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body.' A person becomes part of the body of Christ when they turn to him. Baptism is central. The Holy Spirit is called down at the baptism service; the person is marked with the cross of Christ and becomes part of Christ's body. They are new Christians and part of the church.

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.'

It must be wonderful to read these words if you belong to a people who are used to oppression, if you are habitually told that you are less than others who are 'superior' to you. Well that, says St.

Paul, is just not true, in Christ all are one, 'Jew or Greek, slave or free' and that goes for everyone else. Jesus teaches that we are all children of the same heavenly Father. Paul points out that we are co-heirs with Christ. Nothing matters, not colour, not ethnic origin, not gender, not position in society, nothing. We are all equal in the sight of God and if that is true anywhere it must be true in the church. Feelings of status or superiority just will not do. This message must have been freeing to those first Christians as indeed it should be now. Paul illustrates his point more fully,

¹⁴ 'Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body' that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?'

Looking at this, at least from one perspective, Paul is saying that we are all parts of the whole; we all have a function within the whole because we all have gifts and talents to use in the service of God for his church. Therefore it is utterly ridiculous for one person to think everything depends on them and that they are most important or needed. All should be interdependent if the body is to function properly. Incidentally our word 'member' comes initially from body part as it is used here. Paul is quite literally advocating every member ministry. It is hugely freeing but it is incumbent upon us all to offer our talents not hide them under a bushel, to coin a phrase. It is an excellent metaphor, one part of the body is dependent for its function on another; it is designed as a whole and if one part is lacking the body suffers.

¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ²²On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.'

That is how a real fellowship within the church should function. There is no room for superiority, feelings of indispensability or control; power seeking is a no no. All are important and interdependent. Think of the intertwining line of a Celtic knot work pattern, remove one line and the image is broken, symmetry is destroyed and beauty is lost.

'But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, ²⁵that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.'

There should be no 'dissent' among the body of Christ, as with the human body all should fit together in harmony. There are no inferior members of the church as there are no inferior parts of the human body, all have a vital function and are interdependent. It is when something goes wrong that harmony is lost and dis-ease is the result. The idea that spirit is above the body was not acceptable to Paul, all is God given. The point about the whole body suffering if one part does is a salient one. If you have a pain, say toothache or back pain then it overwhelms you and the whole body suffers, it is the overriding concern until we can get it sorted and things go back to normal. Well Paul extends this metaphor; we should be in harmony in our care for one another so that if a member of the church suffers then we all do. This can be extended to the whole church and indeed

humanity; we should care for the sufferings of all people and do what we can to help. But Paul turns to joy too, we should all rejoice together and particularly in the knowledge that Jesus is our Lord and Saviour, here with us now.

‘Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.

So here Paul draws his metaphor together, ‘Now you are the body of Christ’ so then he outlines gifts and talents and roles given by God. These are not exhaustive and he mentions others in other letters. But his point is that they are appointed by God, through God. An Apostle was one who had seen Jesus and become a follower and witness for Christ, that is principally the disciples and Paul who considered himself an Apostle to the Gentiles because of the encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road. So he goes on to delineate various gifts of service, some very broad such as ‘assistance’ and ‘leadership.’ St. Paul is not advocating a free for all, organisation and thus leadership is central, someone must be at the helm, but the captain would be helpless without the rest of the crew. It is not about status, it is about the good of the whole. We are the body, our head is Jesus. Think of these gifts as part of the body of the church, part of the service we give. It is up to us to find and offer the gifts we have been given and use those gifts humbly in the service of Christ and others but never think they make you better or more powerful than someone else. As he says quite clearly, ²⁹ ‘Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But strive for the greater gifts.’

People can’t all be teachers or leaders etc. and so don’t look with envy on anyone or feel inferior to anyone, thank God for the gifts you have and use them for the good of the whole. God gives gifts for use in the church and in the world through individuals who have them.

This is one layer of meaning but Paul means much more too. ‘You are the body of Christ,’ we are a part of God’s intended purpose, of his new creation.

We are united with Christ in a very special way at communion. This is made very clear in our communion service for example when the priest says ‘as we eat and drink these holy gifts in the presence of your divine majesty, renew us by your Spirit, inspire us with your love and unite us in the body of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.’ This is the Trinity whom we worship, and we are united in the body of Christ.

God’s new creation will come to pass, Jesus will reign as King. God is creating a fully restored humanity and world. This new creation is with us and will be perfected in God’s time. As part of the body of Christ we should try to live new lives, transformed by Jesus just as he transformed the water which became wine. At communion we ‘are partakers of the body and blood’ of Jesus, his body broken, his blood poured out in love to save humanity.’ We are part of his resurrection body. Jesus died in love for us but he was raised and is with his Father taking our ‘humanity to the heights of his throne.’ We should be reflecting the image of God’s new way as lived and taught by Jesus, in the world. We should worship and rejoice in the love Jesus pours on us and remember that God’s Holy Spirit is here with us now.

This is still a time of uncertainty, of fear and for some loss. In prayer we are with our Lord and we are strengthened with God's Holy Spirit in our lives. We are called to serve him and we rejoice and give thanks for our blessings and God given gifts.

Our gospel reading is from Luke. Jesus has been baptised by John in the Jordan, we remember the Holy Spirit descended on him and a voice from heaven proclaimed Jesus as God's Son. This is how our gospel passage begins,

¹⁴ 'Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.'

Notice this; 'Jesus was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.' After the baptism when Jesus is in the wilderness facing temptation he is filled with and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is divine but he is fully human. This dealing with temptation is vital; he needs to overcome personal temptation before his ministry and we need to refer to it. Jesus knows his mission, he is the promised Messiah. How will he fulfil that role, he will reign over all, but how to do it? Temptation whispers in his ear, do it by force, do it by acts and miracles. Jesus resists all these human desires and is true to his calling. The Messiah came to all people, he will reign over all peoples not just the Jews. Remember Jesus has been preparing for his ministry throughout his life by long years of prayer, scripture study and worship. At his baptism his role has been confirmed and he has turned to his path and ministry. Temptation has been rejected; he knows his way, God's way.

He goes around Galilee teaching in the synagogues and performing acts of healing but now he goes home to Nazareth. People have heard about him, they have heard how his behaviour and teaching have been praised, this is their man brought up here so surely they will be favoured.

¹⁶ 'When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,'

Just imagine the scene, silence and expectation, all eyes fixed on him. Jesus opens the scroll it is the prophet Isaiah and the passage is a Messianic one. Isaiah is telling of the coming Messiah,

'He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Notice how this begins, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,' just as our passage begins, 'Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit,' this is central. God's Messiah is filled with the Holy Spirit, this is God's anointed one. At first sight to the onlookers this seems simply to be a young man reading the scroll, as always happened, **and then**

²⁰ 'And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

It is those words, 'this scripture has been fulfilled' that turns everything upside down. This is the moment. What Jesus is saying is, 'I am he.'

Just look at the words from Isaiah, what is it the Messiah will do? The Messiah comes to the Jewish nation but he will free and rule over all the nations. That is the prophecy and that should be part of their belief. The trouble was, most of them saw the Messiah as their private property, in other words the Messiah belonged to the Jews. What Isaiah writes and what Jesus affirms is that the Messiah comes to all. The people mentioned here in the prophecy are not the rich, the powerful or those with status in society. They are not the religious leaders who consider that they have it right with God. No, these are 'the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed.' These are the downtrodden, the despised and the helpless. Jesus has come to 'let the oppressed go free.' The Messiah has come to change lives, to take away their burdens and to give new life, life in all its fullness. Those who are blind will see, not just literally but metaphorically.

Those who hear him cannot fail to be moved by him, cannot fail to be impressed as it says in the verses that follow,

²²'All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?'

The word 'gracious' has layers of meaning, of course and to us it must mean the grace of God and it is important that we recognise this. Jesus wins salvation for us in love at Calvary. It is God's grace freely given which sets us free.

Jesus turns things around for all who turn to him. It is life changing, completely freeing. Jesus is the King of the cosmos, he is for all people. He is our pattern and our King. He heals and sets the prisoners free, whatever their prison. We are his brothers and sisters, God is our Father and the Spirit is with us at every hour of every day.

'Send your Spirit on all in your church whom you call to be turning the world upside down.'

Patrick Appleford

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