

Sermon for 3rd Sunday after Epiphany 23rd January 2022, Corinthians Chapter 12 ,verses 12 to 31.

Good morning friends this morning we are going to continue with looking at 1st Corinthian's Chapter 12 Recalling and following on from Roxanne last week.

I want to let you know ahead of time that as you leave here today that I really have one goal for you and that goal is this, I.... I.... pray that every single one of you understands how incredibly Valuable you are and how important you are, to the health, the life and the unity of the church here at Holy Trinity/Little River Lara / Little River can be a very lonely place. Our growing suburb our once little village, can be a very lonely place and many people live a very lonely life, there is extreme loneliness everywhere around us. Its like on one hand we are more connected technologically right,... but people feel more disconnected than every. Loneliness was... kind of like the original not good in all of Gods creation. God creates the heavens and he says its good, He creates Light and he says its good, He creates Plants and animals, good, good. Then He creates Adam, and it's the first time God says there something that's not good in Creation. Adam is lonely, And that's really

interesting because he had God. But yet there was a sense that Adam was alone.

And so what does God say He says that I will create a helper someone that is just like him and so he creates Eve.

When Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane in his moment of extreme anguish, intense anxiety, just a few hours before the cross he says, James, Peter, John, I need the three of your guys to come with me. I don't want to be alone. I am about to face death by crucifixion. I'm going to carry the sins of the world upon my shoulders and I'm going to pray, and he takes this prayer walk through the garden, and He does not do it alone.

And here's the thing, the sad fact of the matter is that churches can be lonely places. People can feel isolated and lonely. And that was never God's intention for his people THE CHURCH. He created us all as social creatures with the need to be with others.

See the church is about being Community, about being in relationship through and with God and with each other.

So Last week we heard that God has actually gifted every single believer to help combat this, in the form

of at least one spiritual gift and spiritual gifts are not about you, spiritual gifts are about others, Paul says for the Common Good, so my gift is not about me, my gift is about you, It about being a blessing for you, its about building up the congregation of this church.

But back in Corinth the believers caused disunity in the church. Either they thought well my gifts aren't that important, therefore I am not that important, so I really don't count. And then you had those who were saying my gifts are really important and I'm superior to others and they were using the good things God had given them and they were fragmenting the congregation.

So Paul writes to correct their behaviour, and he says essentially it is absurd and ridiculous for you to take the good things that God has given you and use them to promote disunity.

There are a wide variety of gifts, skills, talents, and abilities and they are all for the common good.

So in order to emphasise or highlight this point to help people understand, Paul uses an analogy between the Church and the Physical Body. This leads us to todays reading from 1st Corinthians Chapter 12. Verse 12 onwards

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. 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.

Here is what Paul is saying, The Body of Christ, that is the Church is ONE,..... WHY, because we were all Baptised into the Same Spirit. We weren't baptised into different Spirits. Remember the word Baptise carries the idea of identification in other words the Christian Community is one in Unity because we are all identified in the same Spirit the Spirit of God that is the Holy Spirit and its if , Christians all over the world are wearing one jumper, and that jumper simply reads Team JESUS. And so Paul is about to launch into a conversation and help them understand that what ever dividing lines we have created they are artificial and unnecessary and that is what is leading to the chaos in our churches.

We still create dividing lines (Colour, Politics Power, wealth and many more) in congregations and Pauls says its is absurd and its ridiculous, because we have been identified in the same Spirit of God, there is one Spirit and that Spirit breeds unity.

We all need God and this is why when you walk into a room of Christians whom you have never met before, there is an instant bond an instant connection with the people, feeling the love, feeling the warmth, feeling the connection, feeling the friendship, an instant connection, it should feel like home. This is what experiencing the church should be like all in Unity.

This place is a room, the church is an experience, and what are we experiencing. Are we experiencing the same as each other and others in the room. A room full of people who have been radically transformed by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, into the Body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12 verses 12 to 31 makes some strong points.

First of all, it says that we are Christ's body.

Note that it doesn't say like Christ's body, but we are Christ's body. We are a group of people linked to Christ: that's what we have in common.

We are individuals that's true and Jesus has saved us as individuals, but we have been joined together in baptism to Jesus, we have been called together into God's family as brothers and sisters, together we are God's own people (1 Peter 2:9, Col 3:12).

Secondly, again I say that we all have the same Spirit that links us to each other. We have all received the same Holy Spirit who calls us to worship the one Saviour, believe in the one true God, and support and comforts all of us in our time of need.

Our oneness in God our heavenly Father who made us and loves each of us with such intensity and adopts us as his own children; our oneness in Christ our Saviour and the Holy Spirit who calls us into God's Church; this oneness breaks down all of our differences.

One of the most revolutionising things about Christianity in its early stages was the way it broke down barriers. It turned the world of its time on its head. For the first time master and slave met in the same building for the same purpose, shared the same meals, stood or knelt side by side in worship.

For the first time male and female were able to worship without the marked divisions that Jewish worship demanded.

For the first time Jew and Gentile were able to meet together as equals before the one God whom they worshipped.

The reality is that the church broke down barriers which society still practised. The church was at the forefront of change. It refused to follow the ways of the world but set a different standard that eventually the world adopted for itself. And it did that because it

was faithful to what they understood it meant to be joined, linked to Christ as one body.

The third thing this passage emphasises is that while each of us has separate, individual gifts, we all belong to each other, need each other, we all, together, make up what we call church. Paul uses this picture of the body. I don't have to repeat it, you know how it goes. The point of Paul's picture of the church as a body is two-fold.

One: we are all of value and all have a part to play. And two: we can't do without each other. Just as a hand can't decide to live in isolation from the rest – if it does it's either a disconnected hand or it's not a hand at all – so we can't live in isolation from each other.

There's no such thing as a Christian who lives in isolation from everybody else. To be a Christian means that you exist in relation to others - you need others just as they need you.

Paul summarised this new oneness that people shared when he said, "*All of you are Christ's body*". Now remember to whom Paul was writing these words. Here was a congregation of very gifted people but they couldn't get on, they argued, they showed little care for certain sections of the congregation, they big noted themselves and thought of themselves as more important and more spiritual than the rest, they took

one another to court, they had all kinds of problems when it came to worship and agreeing on how things were to be done, and yet in spite of all of this Paul opens his letter by calling them "*the saints at Corinth*" and then says "*Each one of you is part of the body of Christ. Without a doubt, you are the body of Christ*". He doesn't say to them, "Now listen here, you guys, this is what it should be like and I know that you will never achieve this". Instead he deliberately and firmly says, "You are the church, the fellowship of believers, in fact, the body of Christ, and this is how it is".

It's not like life out there in the world. You can't use worldly ways when it comes to the body of Christ. Out there people use one another, unfairly and rudely criticise one other, run others down to promote themselves. Out there people get all huffy and abusive if they don't get their own way, are jealous of those who get more attention or given greater status, use their skills and time selfishly for personal gain only.

In the church things are different. Here our function and purpose is for the good of each other.

If one is sad, then we all share that sadness.

If one is disadvantaged, we all feel that disadvantage.

If one is sick then we long for them to be well.

If one is separated, we want for them to have a sense of belonging.

If one is struggling to cope, we sense that struggle. And conversely, if one gets a promotion we're glad for their success.

If a person deserves praise, we're liberal in giving them some praise.

We encourage others to use their gifts to the fullest. We look around and recognise that some don't seem to have a particular outstanding talent but we honour them too so that there is no discord, no bitterness, no ill-feeling in the body of Christ.

In the church, in the Christian fellowship, there's a different set of values which affects the way we operate absolutely. This doesn't happen naturally. That only happens and can only happen, when individuals, when people are linked to Christ. And then it follows that the stronger the link to Christ the more that kind of interaction and togetherness becomes a reality.

I believe that is a key issue – how can we expect to be the body of Christ when we don't know Christ and his will is for us? It is through reading the scriptures, studying them, learning from them, receiving Holy Communion, asking Jesus in prayer for his guidance and help, and allowing the love of God in Jesus really affect our daily lives that we know Christ and see our place within his body, the church. The church will be just another group of people or club unless we know

the Saviour and realise again that he has called us together to be his people in this community.

I think you would agree that there is plenty of room for repentance and change. There is plenty of room to do a stocktake of what Jesus and his church means to each of us; plenty of room to acknowledge that we have often adopted the attitude of "what can I get out of the church" rather than "what can I give to Christ through the church".

There is plenty of space to admit that we have preferred to sit back and let everyone else do things rather than offering to work with our fellow team mates in the body of Christ. It is pretty easy to not be involved in the church; after all, we do have our lives to live!

There is little doubt that there are many things that we don't like about the human side of the church.

The church is church only because of Jesus. We are called into the church to be with Christ and with those whom Christ has saved. We are here because of the love that Christ has for us and the forgiveness he has won for us. This is what makes the church different to every other organisation in the world. We are motivated by the love of Christ to be like Christ to others – welcoming the outcast, accepting the sinner, comforting a little child, welcoming the cheat, encouraging the depressed,

In many ways we do reflect the concept of the body of Christ in this church. There is a sense of caring for each other, of showing concern, of building up and encouraging and helping when it's most needed.

But we could improve. We could work harder at building up rather than tearing down, at strengthening rather than weakening, at thinking corporately (which means "as a body"), rather than individually.

We can commit ourselves to be an organism, a living thing, something that works, and so benefit each other. In our own small way, we as "church" and as individual members of church can shape the community in which we live.

How do you see the church and your place in it?

I want to challenge you this morning as this year gets under way. Think about what Holy Trinity/ Christ Church means to you. Try to develop a sense of belonging here. Don't just talk about it as "Holy Trinity Church" but as *my* church or *our* church.

What we try to do here on Sunday mornings is to help us all get focused in the one direction, and as we focus on the God we believe in, as we show each other that he's important to us just by our presence here, as we get strength for the days in-between worship, we get a sense of being part of a big family which is important to us, which we can count on, to

which we can give what we are able to give and we can be a body that functions the way God intends it to function.

Why bother with this? Because it is here amongst the people of God that we find Jesus and his love for us. We tell each other through words and practical ways that God loves us and is ready to do whatever is necessary to help us be the Christians he wants us to be in present here in Lara/ Little River. It is this love of God that has called us together – as different as we might all be – to be his church.

Paul says to us, *"Together you are the body of Christ".and are valued.*

The Lord be with you.,

Warren Rumble January 2022.