

Sermon: Spiritual gifts are given to bless lives  
 Psalm 23     1 Corinthians 12: 4-14

Sunday, February 23, 2025

Paul's idea in this morning's reading is to stress the essential unity of the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ, and the characteristic of a healthy body is that every part in it performs its own function for the good of the whole. But unity does not mean uniformity, and therefore, we know that within the Church there are differing gifts with various functions. We'll hear more about this at our Annual General Meeting; that every function is a gift of the same Spirit, designed for the good of the whole church to the glory of God. Paul begins by saying that all special gifts come from God and it is his belief that they must be used in God's service. It has often been said that the modern Church has interpreted the idea of special gifts in a somewhat limited way. While gifts like speaking, praying, teaching, and writing are gifts of the mind, they can exclude such gifts as working with our hands and feet to and for the glory of God and His kingdom on earth. The stone mason, the carpenter; like Joseph and Jesus Himself; the electrician, the painter, the engineer, and the plumber all have special gifts from God, to be used for God. Among the many blessings from God, Paul begins with two, which sound very like each other; the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. Both are necessary; the wisdom which knows by communion with God the deep things of God, and the knowledge which; in the daily life of the world and the Church; can put that same wisdom into practice. To this, the apostle adds faith; the faith that produces results. It is not just the intellectual conviction that something is true; it is the passionate belief in something which makes a person spend all that they are and have on it. It is the faith that steels the will and reinforces the stamina of a person toward the goal.

Armed with this wisdom, knowledge, and faith, we set ourselves to undertake the opportunities and challenges; which like any church; lay before us. I know in my heart that we will plant some good seeds at our Annual Meeting. We will be attentive with our eyes, we will listen with our ears, we will pray in our spirits, we will clasp our hands together, and we will place our feet firmly on the path that God sets before us. All in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; "One church, one faith, one Lord".

French philosopher, Michel de Montaigne, was one of the wisest writers who wrote during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Renaissance. He once said of a child's education, "I would have their limbs trained no less than their brains. It is not a mind we are educating nor a body; it is a person. And we must not split that person in two". It has been said that the Church distinguishes a person into two parts; the soul and the body; accepting responsibility for one's soul but not for one's body. It is good that in our time we have once again learned to treat a person as a whole being. The picture that I hope is emerging is of the Church; the Body of Christ; a blessing for all. Paul knew then, as we know now, that all the powerful activity in Christ's church is the work of the Holy Spirit who gives each one of us individually the gifts to use for all corporately.

And now for a little anatomy and philosophy. We have always been fascinated by the way in which the different parts of the body cooperate. The following was written about unity of the body; our physical body and the church body; beginning with the ancient Greek philosopher Plato and ending with Christ's apostle Paul.

Plato drew a famous picture in which he had said that

“the head was the citadel;

the neck, the isthmus between the head and the body;

the heart, the fountain of the body;  
 the pores, the lanes of the body;  
 the veins, the canals of the body”.

Later, the apostle drew his picture of *the Church* as a body. A body consists of many parts but there is in it an essential unity. Plato had pointed out that we do not say, "My finger has a pain". We say, "I have a pain". There is an I; me; a personality, which gives unity to the many and varying parts of the body. What the I; me; is to the body, Christ is to the Church. It is in Jesus that all the diverse parts of the church find their unity. Paul goes on to look at this in another way. "You", he says, "are the body of Christ". Jesus is no longer in this world as a physical body, so when Jesus wants something done in the world, He has to find a person to do it.

When Jesus wants a child taught, He has to find a teacher.

When our Lord wants a sick person cured, He has to find a physician or a surgeon.

When our Saviour wants His story told, He has to find someone to tell it.

We must literally be Christ's body; His eyes, ears, heart, hands, and feet; until He comes again. And from both Plato's and Paul's interactive description of a body, we can better see certain things that exist in the Church that are the body of Christ, working together as the body of Christ. First, we can see that we need one another. There can be no such thing as isolation in the Church. And even when we become busy in our own tasks, we are aware that others are also fulfilling theirs. We know that the church is a healthy body when we realize how much we all benefit from the work that everyone can do. We also know that when any part of the body ceases to function, the whole body is thrown out of whack. It takes all of us working together. And when any one part of the body is afflicted in some way, all the others suffer in sympathy because they cannot help it. The Church is a whole family. Paul speaks of various forms of service and the role of the apostles, whose authority came from having accompanied Jesus during his life, and their having witnessed the Resurrection.

From the Acts of the Apostles, we read;

“Therefore, it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.

So, they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs'. Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so, he was added to the eleven apostles”.

The apostles were those who were closely connected with Jesus in His days among them and in the days of His risen power. Jesus never wrote a word on paper. Instead, he still writes His message upon human hearts. And that, Friends, is the practical application; the relevance for us today; of our wisdom, our knowledge, and our faith for those who are in desperate need for Jesus to write His indelible message upon their heart *by our being with them where they are on their journey*. Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life", and even today in this so-called post-modern world, we can be the hands and feet of God, as well as a voice for Jesus declaring that “the goal of human history, is to have Christ at the centre of the human race, the joy of every heart and the fullness of all our hopes”.

I'll finish today with this poem.  
 "The World's Bible", by Annie Johnson Flint.

Christ has no hands but our hands  
 To do His work today;  
 He has no feet but our feet  
 To lead people in His way;  
 He has no tongues but our tongues  
 To tell people how He died;  
 He has no help but our help  
 To bring them to His side.

We are the only Bible  
 The careless world will read;  
 We are the sinner's Gospel,  
 We are the scoffer's creed;  
 We are the Lord's last message,  
 Given in deed and word;  
 What if the type is crooked?  
 What if the print is blurred?

What if our hands are busy  
 With work other than His?  
 What if our feet are walking  
 Where sin's allurements is?  
 What if our tongues are speaking  
 Of things His lips would spurn?  
 How can we hope to help Him  
 And hasten His return?

The answer for us today is to be the face of Christ; a blessing to all whom we meet.  
 "One church, one faith, one Lord." To God be the glory, now and forever, world without end.  
 Amen.

If you are reading this sermon and you have not been at the Worship Service for a while,  
 please know that you are missed, and it would be good to see you.

God bless you.

Robert