

20210926 Reflection on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Lord God, you have declared that your kingdom is among us. Open our eyes to see it, our ears to hear it, our hearts to hold it, our hands to serve it. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

One body with many members

When you prune roses or thorny plants, your hands can be hurt by thorns, even though you wear garden gloves. If a thorn is embedded in the skin, it is not only irritating but also painful too. Worse still, if you don't treat it in time, it will develop skin disease, which can lead you to death. A tiny thorn in your finger can lead the whole body to death. The wellbeing of each member of the body is indispensable as long as it contributes to the overall wellbeing of the body. Without the body, an individual member will not exist. It is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. It may be called unity in diversity.

We often confuse unity with uniformity. It is much easier to be with like-minded people than to reach across the divisions that mark our culture. In Corinth, Paul's focus was on social, ethnic and economic diversities. Problems arose in the Corinthian church when they failed to understand the value of their diversity. Some members have been "puffed up,"¹ believing that they enjoyed the greater gifts as if they were personal accomplishments. They were failing to acknowledge the value of other people's gifts, even though they were dependent on each other.

While the powers of this world are based on division on which they depend, the power of God is based on unity in the same Spirit. The Corinthians had been competing with one another according to their culturally defined values. They were using the gifts of the Holy Spirit, meant for the good of the whole community, as their personal asset in the competition for honour at the expense of others. For Paul, however, our foundation can be found in baptism² in which we experience the Spirit of God at work to overcome the divisions. By pointing to the church's common experience of God's grace in baptism, Paul makes clear that we all share the same water, the same promise, the same Spirit, and thus all are equally part of the same body.

The issues that Gisborne Presbyterian Parish have for now are not the same as the Corinthians'. We are not competing with one another over better spiritual gifts, or socio-economic status, or ethnic issues. Our issues are how to discern a way to move towards as the church, together with individual members' interests that have to work for the wellbeing of the whole living body. As

¹ 1 Corinthians 4:6

² 1 Corinthians 12:13

the body of Christ, we are in a dire situation that needs our unity in diversity more than ever. May God help us discern God's will as we will have the AGM right after the service. Open our hearts and minds to listen to Your words. Help us speak for the wellbeing of the whole body through the Holy Spirit so that we will live continually as the body of Christ today and always. Amen.