

## GPP St Andrew's Sunday 22 September 2019 AGM Day

**Congregational Story Time:** about all having different gifts and being God's people, the church, part of the body of Christ - like jigsaw pieces fitting together

**Readings:** 1 Corinthians 12: 1, 4 – 27 (The Message Bible version)

What I want to talk about now is the various ways God's Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable.

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit.

God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful:

- wise counsel clear understanding
- simple trust healing the sick
- miraculous acts
- proclamation
- distinguishing between spirits
- tongues
- interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. He decides who gets what, and when.

You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts - limbs, organs, cells - but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain - his Spirit - where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves - labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free - are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to

remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a part of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way - the "lower" the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

You are Christ's body - that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything.

### **1 Peter 2: 4-5 Good News Translation (GNT)**

Come to the Lord, the living stone rejected by people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable. Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.

### **1 Peter 2: 9-10**

But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light. At one time you were not God's people, but now you are his people; at one time you did not know God's mercy, but now you have received his mercy.

## **Hymn: God who sets us on a journey**

God who sets us on a journey to discover, dream and grow,  
Lead us as you led your people in the desert long ago;  
Journey inward, journey outward, stir the spirit, stretch the mind,  
Love for God and self and neighbour marks the way that Christ defined.

Exploration brings new insights, changes, choices we must face;  
Give us wisdom in deciding, mindful always of your grace;  
Should we stumble, lose our bearings, find it hard to know what's right,  
we regain our true direction, focused on the Jesus light.

End our longing for the old days, grant the vision that we lack –  
Once we've started on this journey there can be no turning back;  
Let us travel light, discarding excess baggage from our past,  
Cherish only what's essential, choosing treasure that will last.

When we set up camp and settle to avoid love's risk and pain,  
You disturb complacent comfort, pull the tent pegs up again;  
Keep us travelling in the knowledge you are always at our side;  
Give us courage for the journey, Christ our goal and Christ our guide.

Words: Joy Dine    Tune: Hyfrydol

## **Reflection:    WHO ARE YOU AS THE CHURCH IN THIS PLACE?**

- *Exodus 6: 7a    You are my people and I will be your God*
- *“through each perplexing path of life our wandering footsteps guide”*
- **Jeremiah 31: 33    God makes a new covenant with us**  
*written on our hearts.*
- **Listening to God together - a process of discernment**
- **Wisdom from Scripture, learning from experience, inspiration from God**

Our journey through life is not just about getting from one place to another but about discovering, dreaming and growing along the way. In order to truly be the people of God in this place we need to have our spirits stirred and our minds stretched, not just sit back comfortably without continuing to grow spiritually. Following the compassionate way of Jesus, living the kingdom life of God within us, being the people of God, means we need to keep seeking God's wisdom and inspiration in order to do that effectively. It is an exciting way to live and we are on that journey together.

God said to the Hebrew people, through Moses, I will make you my own people and I will be your God. You are God's people here, in this place. I wonder what that means for you?

My encouragement to you today is to say, as our call to worship reminded us, *seek insight from God and trust God*. God is among, around and within us. Be aware of God alive in you and in those around you. Be open to the Spirit of God guiding you in everything. That's what being the people of God means.

In Jeremiah's time God promised to make a new covenant – writing it on people's hearts. Something written on your heart is a powerful image for something becoming so deeply ingrained in you that it controls how you live. Is that what God's way of living is for you? As the church we bring our collective inspiration from God to our times of worship, and other events, as well as our meetings together.

We will sing as part of our prayer today, *Through each perplexing path of life, our wandering footsteps guide*. Life is perplexing, for some of us more than others, but when we wander and are not sure where we are going, we need guidance and wisdom from beyond ourselves – wisdom from God. That applies to individuals but also to us as the people of God together.

There is a special kind of wisdom that comes from discerning together – that is the Spirit of God leading not just one person but a team. We are the church, together – not just as individuals, **together**. Each one of you matters. Each one of you has a part to play. Each one of you is a crucial part of the jigsaw. For example, when decisions need to be made in the Annual General Meeting of this parish today, everyone's viewpoint counts and no-one is more important than another. You are all part of the whole jigsaw picture. You are the church together.

The annual meeting is a time to look back over the past year and be thankful for all that has happened. Yet this is also an opportunity to seek God's inspiration as we look forward, to plan for the future, and to appoint people to do various tasks for the coming

year so that the church will keep functioning well as people take responsibility for different aspects of its life.

The readings we heard today offered us two different images of the church, different ways of seeing what it means to be the people of God.

1 Corinthians 12 explores different spiritual gifts and different ways of serving but shows us that all are important and valued. Paul was writing to the Christians in Corinth to help them understand how to live and work together effectively as Christians. There had been reports of divisions amongst the people and some who thought they were more important than others. The image Paul uses of a body with many parts is quite powerful. All parts are needed. I asked Jill to read from the Message version today because that presents this message in a way that impacts us differently from older translations. For example: *Your body has many parts - limbs, organs, cells – but no matter how many parts you can name, you are still one body. So it is with the church, the body of Christ.*

Paul talks about the eye, hand, foot and ear – parts of the body we can see, but also refers to other parts that we cannot see or that we cover up. Did you take note of the words near the end of the reading? – *The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't.*

*If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance. You are Christ's body - that's who you are. You must never forget this.* You are Christ's body and each one of you has skills and talents to use in God's service.

In two weeks time, after the World Communion and Thanksgiving service here, on October 6, there is an opportunity for you to discover your gifts and have them affirmed, as you affirm others. You might like to come along and be part of that. Your wonderful variety of gifts, abilities and skills each contribute to what makes the people of God in this place, the body of Christ. Some of you do tasks that others do not see – but you are just as important as those who are seen more prominently. Everyone is needed and valued

A different image of the church is found in 1 Peter 2, but it still makes it clear that everyone is valued. The writer describes Jesus as the living stone chosen by God, and the followers of Jesus are also living stones. *Come as living stones and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple.* Christ is the foundation, the cornerstone of the building, but we are part of the building too, and we are God's own people. Each living stone is important.

May you be open to the new insights God might bring to you as you listen to other living stones around you and to the Spirit of God in them. The process of discernment is about seeking wisdom from scripture, learning from experience and seeking inspiration from God, however that might come to you. Maybe inspiration will come to you today through other people, or through the words of hymns, songs and prayers in this service. Be open to the Spirit's leading and seek God's guidance.

God has set you on a journey. There is no going back to what might be seen as a safe and comfortable past. This is a new world, a new phase of your existence. It takes courage to step out into that new world. It is a journey that is both inward and outward that may well stir the spirit and stretch the mind. If we focus on the light of Jesus we can step out confidently. You have a future with God.

As you step into that future, take with you the wisdom you have learned from Scripture, but also what you have learned from experience – your life experience, your faith experience, your experience of being part of a faith community, this church, - and recognise that God's inspiration may come to you through all those sources.

You are God's people in this place – living stones and part of the body. Each of you has a gift to offer to the life you share – your special contribution. Come to the Lord of life for blessing and healing and light. God is with you. God will bless you and guide you.  
Amen

**The choir sings:** Lord of life, we come to you

**Final hymn: God gives us a future**

God gives us a future, daring us to go  
Into dreams and dangers on a path unknown.  
We will face tomorrow in the Spirit's power,  
We will let God change us, for new life starts now.

We must leave behind us sins of yesterday,  
For God's new beginning is a better way.  
Fear and doubt and habit must not hold us back;  
God gives hope and insight and the strength we lack.

Holy Spirit, teach us how to read the signs,  
How to meet the challenge of our troubled times.  
Love us into action, stir us into prayer,  
Till we choose God's life and find our future there.

Words: Elizabeth Smith, Tune: Camberwell