

## FARNHAM PARISH CHURCH

Church and Community

Bible Readings: 1 Cor 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

Theme: Gifts Day

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Last Sunday was Vision Sunday, that day when, at the start of the year, we remind ourselves who God is and who he wants us to be. If you were not here last week, you will be able to pick up what I said from the website in a couple of days' time.

I spoke about the early Christian confession "Jesus is Lord" as the new way people in the early church orientated their lives and put him centre stage and in sharp focus. And 2000 years later, here in Farnham, following Jesus and giving our lives over to his control is still what this is all about.

We spoke about the two words: variety and the same. That the same God, the same spirit, the same Lord works in us and through in a variety of different gifts, services and activities to bring about his plan and purpose for the local church and for the wider world.

Today is Gifts Day, when we think about the ways in which we can play our part in what God is calling us to do and to be. In 1 Corinthians 12:12, Paul says this:

*<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.*

Paul uses the picture of a body. This wasn't particularly a Christian picture – people in the ancient world often thought of groups of people, cities and even nations in body language terms.

Where this picture is distinctive is that this is Christ's body. We don't become part of this body because we live in a particular street or have a particular post code. We become part of this body, Christ's body, because we are baptised into this body. It's a spiritual thing.

The same God who works with us in variety, by his Spirit makes us into his one body with its many members. And we receive our energy, our get up and go, our drive, our ambition, our desire to worship and to serve God from the same place. Paul says:

*and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

So the first thing to note then is that whatever our background, (Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – or we might say northerners, southerners, people from outside the UK even), we are all in it together. We are fired by the same Spirit, drinking of the one Spirit, singing off the same hymn sheet ... or at least we should be!

And what a practical example we had right in front of us this past week with the visit of the ACC. The 8 chaperones and the 17 children were on fire for God ... from very different backgrounds than our own ... but with a passion and a desire to worship and serve God we could learn some things from. I am not suggesting that we put on colourful costumes and sing like they sang and dance like they danced, well not every week ... ! But they were truly inspirational and their story humbling and moving all at the same time.

*and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

... wherever we come from and whatever our background and experience.

The next thing to note is that we are to be interdependent.

*<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If 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. <sup>16</sup> And 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.*

Low self-esteem and jealousy are crippling things. Looking with envy at others with gifts we don't have is utterly disabling. Thinking that we don't fit because we are not a this or a that is the beginning of a very slippery slope.

I have been telling the Alpha groups this week a bit about myself. How that when I was 14 yrs old I was involved in an incident on the rugby pitch at school. This, in connection with a dodgy trip to the dentist, they think, left me with osteomyelitis and septicaemia, 6 months stay in hospital flat on my back, and a very long slow road to recovery ahead. No more rugby for me ... only now to watch it from the comfort of the armchair or the cosy settee.

Since that time, I have not been able to play any contact sport or any physical team game. There has been no running about for me. But I can play the piano and I can sing.

It would be too easy to approach the 6 nations or the World Cup Rugby with a heavy heart, an anger towards God, and a bitter and twisted mindset for what is not possible. Better to be grateful for what I have got and for what I can do.

Feet, hands, ears and eyes are all equally important, Paul says. They play different functions, of course and for sure, ... but they are all necessary. They are all critically important parts of the body.

We are to be interdependent – we need each other to do and to be what God wants us to do and to be. Many members, one body, one Spirit.

And that interdependence brings both challenges and opportunities...

*<sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.*

Challenge when there is a struggle. Opportunity where there is commendation.

How often do we all know the pain of one individual's heart-ache? How often do we know the uncertain waiting for a diagnosis or the result of a test? How often do we celebrate when one of us wins an award, passes an exam, gets a place at the university of our choice, the promotion we have worked so hard to achieve?

Suffering and honouring are both part of this kind of body life we are called to experience. And as church family, I hope more and more we know what it looks like and what it feels like.

I don't know whether you have noticed, but two things stand out about our worshipping life together on a Sunday morning – the Peace takes longer than it used to and people don't leave straight away any more. These are simple signs of this kind of body life being more important to us than it used to be. We seem to want to hang out together more than we did. To share the challenge and the opportunity ... over nice coffee and good quality biscuits.

So, we are members of one body and we are interdependent ... the final thing to notice is the mention of some of the kinds of gifts Paul has in mind.

In the NT there are various lists of gifts and ministries. There is some overlap. There is some special inclusion. There is no sense even in taking them all together that the lists are exhaustive. Indeed, it can seem to be a bit of a muddle.

Here the list is as follows:

*<sup>28</sup> And 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.*

It's a funny mixture of:

- roles in the life of the church: apostles, prophets, teachers
- ministries in the life of the church: deeds of power, gifts of healing, forms of assistance and leadership.
- the gift of tongues, a special kind of prayer language gift given to some, but not all believers.

I was speaking last week about the variety that there is in our current church life experience. I said that if we just focussed on what happens for an hour or so here on a Sunday morning, we would have a very small picture of the whole thing.

So it is with this list and these lists ... I want to draw our attention to one or two of them ...

Apostles, prophets and teachers

Here at St Andrew's we have people occupying various ones of these roles. The clergy, the LLMs, those who bring words of prophecy, words from God from time to time, like Caroline, and those who lead small groups for adults and for young people and children.

We are always on the look out for more people to fulfil these roles, some of which require training, some of which we might think we might have a go at one day. If you feel nudged about any of them, please do have a word with me or with John. God delights to grow leaders from within a church family and he may be doing that even now, even this morning as you hear these words spoken.

### Gifts of healing

Here at St Andrew's we have an amazing Pastoral Team. We have three Pastoral Assistants and others who work alongside, to bring comfort, caring and listening to people who may be struggling with life and finding things tough just now. This work is all part of God's healing work in and through his church family here. A lot of this kind of work also goes on between friends and with neighbours, unnoticed and unsung. If this is something you would like to know more about and maybe get involved with a bit more formally, do please let us know. Mary, Mary and Linda would be delighted to speak to you about it.

Many of us were here for the ACC concert last Sunday evening ... but a much smaller number witnessed a most beautiful thing on the Monday morning. The choir was

looking for things to do before they set off to their next venue, and we fixed up for them to go to Bourne Wood Manor, the latest in our collection of Residential Care Homes in the parish where we exercise regular ministry.

The children were welcomed into the main lounge where residents and some family members had gathered. Standing at the door were staff members with tears in their eyes as they saw the children in twos and threes on their knees by the residents, chatting to them and engaging them in conversation. It was a truly remarkable picture of God's healing in action. And when they sang, the visit was complete.

The residents may remember the visit or not. Their family members, though, and the staff standing by, will never, ever, forget it. The local church extending its ministry of healing to older people through guests and visitors from thousands of miles away. It was quite something.

And finally ...

### Forms of assistance and leadership

One of the great joys of church leadership is the chance you get to grow people and to see people raised up into leadership.

On Tuesday evening, Kathryn and I went back to the parish we had come from to have dinner with two old friends – a retired doctor and his wife. He had been one of the parish reps when they were appointing way back in

1998 and his wife had entertained Kathryn on the interview day.

As we reminisced about the glory days (just kidding) we reflected on how many people had come through our hands to go on to ministry elsewhere in the country and in the wider world. They pray for this list of people every morning ... and there are lots of names on it to remember.

Assistance is vital and it can often lead, through experience and the taking of further responsibility, to more exciting leadership opportunities opening up and ministry expanding.

The ACC children we had staying with us – and I guess it would be true of other host families too – had children coming to us in the kitchen and saying “is there anything I can do to help?”

That’s a brilliant ministry question. Is there anything I can do to help? They meant preparing food, washing up, setting the table. We didn’t try them with painting and decorating – we thought that might be pushing our luck a bit!

On this Gifts Day 2019, that is the question I want to leave you with this morning. Is there anything I can do to help?

Many of us are involved already in things beyond Sunday morning and it’s fantastic that we are. This is all about rotas and schedules and lists and teams and working together, serving together, learning together and having

fun together. I am hugely grateful for the many expressions of ministry and service I see all around on a regular basis. Thank you so much for all you do for us.

Some of us, though, are not yet engaged with this side of church family life, and you may be wondering what could I do to help?

In previous years on this Sunday we have put out a list by way of a Gifts Survey. You could tick what you are currently involved in and tick things you might like to know more about.

This year we are not going to do that. There is a sign up sheet but with only one question ... what can I do to help? If you sign this, someone will be in touch with you to have a conversation about what that something might be. It will be a question of looking at your gifts, interests, skills, experience and passions and then taking an honest look at the weekly diary to see what time you have and when and to do what?

If that appeals to you – in an open-ended kind of a way, then please sign up and we will be in touch. You are simply saying I want to be more involved in this member and body thing in this church family. I would like to be able to play my part in something new and I sense God may be calling me to put my hand up and make an offer of my time and my energy and my gifts. Who knows where it might lead?

Let’s pray ...