FARNHAM PARISH CHURCH

St Andrew and St Francis

LOVING GOD I LIVING FAITH I SERVING COMMUNITY

Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Theme: "… the power of God …"

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been immersed in some of the ways God intentionally relates to his people.

In looking at the baptism of Jesus we saw how

- we **heard** the voice of the Father, confirming that this man, Jesus, is the one the world has been waiting for
- we **saw** the submission of the son to the baptism of his cousin John the Baptist,
- and we **observed** the sign of the Spirit who comes down on Jesus like a dove as he is coming out of the water

Last week, on our annual Vision Sunday, we saw how Paul seeks to define and encourage Christians by telling them or reminding them of four keys things:

Christians are those who

- have been **called** by God to be his own holy people
- **belong** to Christ Jesus
- **have** every **spiritual gift** they need
- are **invited** into **partnership**

The reminder of the God who wants relationship and the highlighting of each of these four defining descriptions are so encouraging and helpful as we come today to Gift Day 2026.

At the start of the new year, this day, this Gift Day, allows us the opportunity to think about our response to the God who reaches out to us, who defines us in these ways and who invites us to react and respond. We will be thinking about ways in which we might do that in terms of finance, energy and resources and time.

But first let's notice how Paul moves very quickly, in chapter 1 of his letter, from commendation and encouragement to warning and concern about the ways in which the Christians in Corinth are living out their faith.

He says:

*[10] I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you **agree** with one another in what you say and that there be no **divisions** among you, but that you be perfectly **united** in mind and thought.*

So, Paul is expressing concern about agreement against division and is calling them to unity – presumably because he had heard on the grapevine that there was trouble at 'mill!

This week is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. On Thursday evening we met here at St Andrew's with a number of different churches and groups from across the town to review and celebrate all that God is doing in our different contexts and communities. And it was very exciting to see and to hear what he is up to around the place!

These projects include work with children and young people in the schools, money and debt advice, work with the elderly in our community, Foodbank, supporting and praying for adoptive families, and for those who have been bereaved, and the work of Christian Aid (a truly ecumenical national

charity). In one sense it is breathtaking and really sobering to get a bigger picture of the difference Christian ministry and mission makes to our lives in Farnham. God is good!

And there was a lovely sense of togetherness, of common purpose of shared vision and desire for God's work to continue, to develop and to flourish here in our town.

It felt like there was agreement, no sense of division and plenty of expression of unity.

Now of course, there is a critical distinction between division and difference. Division is bad. Difference is good. Difference speaks of variety, of choice, of emphasis and of priority. Difference speaks of enriching, of empowering, of mutual learning and of sharing best practice.

You will be pleased to know, I hope, that the church leaders in town and many of the members of the different churches we lead are friends as well as colleagues. We are praying for each other, cheering each other on and doing what we can to support one another where it's appropriate to do so.

We are not all the same. Our churches in town are not all the same. But we do all share a commitment to follow Jesus, to make his name known and to extend his kingdom. And in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it's good to remember that.

So, Paul is underlining and emphasising how important this togetherness thing is. And he gets into all this because someone has blown the gaff:

*[11] My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are **quarrels** among you.*

Paul has heard on the grapevine that all is not well in in the church in Corinth. Just like all was not always well with the Traitors this week in the amazing castle in Scotland.

It's good to note that 2000 years ago there were quarrels. Not that quarrelling is good … but quarrelling can be the start of shared learning and the extension of grace towards those with whom we might disagree. This would mean that differences are explored graciously, and division is avoided hopefully.

Of course, it's just true that every family has its quarrels and differences of opinion about certain things. That in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. It's what we do with that that really matters.

And the quarrel Paul seems to have been told about is all about what we might call the cult of personality. He says this:

[12] What I mean is this: one of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.'

Now obviously, all leaders (if they are any good) have an appeal amongst certain people. We are just naturally drawn towards some people and the way they look, speak, do things or decide things or go about their business of leading. But if it all becomes about the person rather than the cause they represent, we basically run the risk of losing the plot.

This is partly why I react against any idea when I hear it of St Andrew's or St Francis being "David's church." I know that people do identify a church with a person when they are the leader of it. But I have never thought it was helpful to make the connection quite so explicitly and clear. So, I always refer to myself as The Rector of Farnham – that is my official title – and I always say I lead the team here at St Andrew's. It's our church, friends, it's not my church.

And the names Paul picks out as illustrations of this quarrelling are interesting:

Paul (originally called Saul, a Jewish name) becomes Paul which is Latin or Greek for small or humble

Apollos is a Greek name

Cephas is an Aramaic word – a nickname meaning rock or stone

So, there's some question whether all this quarrelling, all this division was along racial lines. Is that what this was all about?

And, of course, the fourth name Paul mentions is "Christ."

How important it is to see that whoever the local leader might be, they (he or she) is only a servant of Christ. Jesus is the one who unites. Whatever our differences, we are united in him.

And Paul asks (using his own name as an example):

[13] Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised in the name of Paul?

In other words, how can you have got this so out of whack that you think that I or any of these others (Apollos or Cephas) could be or do what only Jesus could be or do?

We might imagine Paul saying: Sort yourselves out. Get your perspective right. Make sure you have the bigger picture, the Jesus picture, not the much smaller vision or version of your local favoured charismatic leader person.

Whatever our differences, we are united in Jesus.

And then Paul wraps this up with a rallying cry after some confusion over quite how many people he had baptised over the years. He doesn't seem entirely sure about that. But he does says this:

[17] For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

[18] For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

And there are two things for us to notice here:

1 Paul knows his priorities

2 Paul is clear about keeping the main thing the main thing

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[17] For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – not with wisdom and eloquence …

Those of us who are working and those of us with active and busy lives on email, will know that the inbox can be a total nightmare.

There are those who check their email first thing in the morning and last thing at night. There are those who check their emails before they get on the plane and as soon as it lands. There are those who check their emails on the beach, by the pool, in the pool! Some of us just can't be away from our email in case something important comes in that we need to respond to in the first 10 seconds of seeing it's there!

Those who are better about not looking at email are terrified of going on holiday because they know what will be waiting for them when they get back and next check in. A lot can happen in two weeks!

And when you see what is in your inbox, how do you prioritize? Who do you reply to first? Who can wait? Who can we just ignore … and, if it's important, they'll send a reminder or a gentle (or not so gentle) nudge?

There were many things that Paul could have done in his leadership of the local church in Corinth … but he knew that baptizing, important though that was, was not the most important thing. Others could baptize. His gift, his priority, his job was preaching the gospel. He was humble about that – he says not with wisdom or eloquence, although of course he was clearly one of if the most wise and eloquent of the NT writers. But he was clear about that too: the message he had to communicate was not ultimately effective because of fancy words, phrases or rhetoric. The message was effective because the message was about the cross and the cross has a power of its own to change and transform.

So, Paul knows his priority. He also is clear about keeping the main thing the main thing.

2 Paul is clear about keeping the main thing the main thing

18 For the message of the cross … to us who are being saved is the power of God.

That Jesus died for the sins of the world is the key thing Paul had to communicate. That's why we have Communion services as often as we do. It's why we focus on the death of Jesus as much as if not more than the events of his life. The book some of us have been reading "The Greatest Story Ever Told" by Bear Grylls, paints the death and resurrection pictures most movingly and beautifully. Jesus was born. Jesus lived for sure. But most importantly Jesus died.

So different from other world faith leaders, so different from other political leaders, so different from other charismatic characters from the pages of history. It's the death of the man – and his resurrection from the dead – that marks Jesus out as so special; and it's the death of the man – and his resurrection from the dead - that makes Paul forensically focussed on that aspect of his story.

So, let's recap …

We have spoken about difference, about division and about unity.

We have spoken about quarrelling and what to do when we encounter difference before it becomes division.

We have spoken about knowing our priorities and about keeping the main thing the main thing.

What then shall we do about any of this on this Gift Day?

I would like to suggest that there are some things we might consider if we buy into all this Jesus stuff and if we see the Christian faith, our involvement with this local church and our being followers of Jesus as our main thing.

We might consider: money, time and energy, gift or skill.

We might consider:

How much **money** each week or each month do we give to keep this kingdom show on the road?

Every month we give just over £8000 to the diocese principally to pay for me, for the upkeep of my house, for the training of others and as a small contribution to the national church.

That's not say that I am paid £8000 a month or anything like it. Clergy across the country are on a stipend of just over £30,000 pa. Kathryn and I each year take a look at our joint income. We allocate 10% of it as that part we give away. And we contribute a significant percentage of our joint salary to the work of St Andrew's. This goes towards the £8000 plus all the other expenses we have in running our church.

So, we could consider: how much money each week or each month do we give to keep this kingdom show on the road? If we all were to look at our personal numbers, what percentage would we see we are at?

You can find out about the Parish Giving Scheme on the website or you can use the giving stations or put cash in the pillar safe. As a matter of interest all these ways of giving have increased in 2025. God has been good to us. All the numbers are up. But are you part of it yet? Might you be if you're not yet? Giving just when we come to church is of course a good thing. But an even better thing, for the treasurer and his budget, might be a committed regular giving plan.

That's money. We could also consider:

How much **time and energy** we might give towards keeping this kingdom show on the road. How many hours each week might we have to help with something around the life and work of the church.

Some of that might be a one-off something. Some of it might be a regular committed something.

At present we are specifically looking for:

- Someone with a car to do a pick up at Heathrow Airport on Wednesday afternoon to collect the Time for God volunteers and bring them to Farnham
- One or two people who might be interested in being part of a verging and hospitality team for weddings and funerals
- One or two people who might be interested in helping with the banking of cash here in town

Money. Time and Energy. Finally, we could also consider:

If there is some **gift or skill** that we have, some aspect of our working life that might help with keeping this kingdom show on the road. Is there something that maybe only we

could bring to the party? The main areas of our church life are described as up in and out –

- up: means our worship, our study and learning life
- in: means our pastoral care of our church family and our community,
- out: means the ways in which we reach out into our part of Farnham to make a difference and to do good.

And so, finally, let's pray in a prayer attributed to Desmond Tutu, who knew all about partnerships and about the possibilities of change and transformation, who knew about difference and about unity and about keeping the main thing the main thing ... and who in this prayer, encourages us to think big and pray bigger …

Disturb us, O Lord when we are too well-pleased with ourselves when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little, because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, O Lord when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the water of life when, having fallen in love with time, we have ceased to dream of eternity and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of Heaven to grow dim.

Stir us, O Lord to dare more boldly, to venture into wider seas where storms show Thy mastery, where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.

In the name of Him who pushed back the horizons of our hopes and invited the brave to follow. Amen.