

## Being Part of the Body, the Church

Reading: 1 Corinthians 12: 12 - 27

There's a pretty idea around in our country at present which runs like this: "We all matter, and we all matter equally, Therefore we are all equally capable, and anybody is capable of doing any job if they believe in themselves." It sounds nice, but it's got several things wrong with it, and if we extend it into church life, it has more things wrong with it.

But the first part of it: Do we all matter, and do we all matter equally to God? Yes! The Bible is full of God calling people from all walks of life, Jesus dealing with all classes of people, the Holy Spirit being poured out on all people, and the gospel going out to all nations. If we ask, "To whom do we matter?" or, "Who says that we all matter equally?", then the answer for Christians is, "We matter to God. He says so." Of course, Hitler said that we aren't all equally important, and look where that led. We need to remind ourselves constantly that if God says that we all matter equally to him, who are we to write people off as of less importance, as probably all of us do at times.

And God also says that we show our attitude to Him in how we deal with the weakest people. In the Old Testament it's the orphan, the widow and the "alien within thy gates" (ie foreigner), who are examples of people who may be vulnerable. In the New Testament Jesus says, "Whatever you do to the least of these you do to me."

I was speaking to St Peter's School this week about one of the Christian values they have chosen: Respect. And I asked them how they would feel if I were to bow and scrape to the Headteacher but look down on or shout at one of the youngest pupils or at a dinner lady or the caretaker. Jesus said, "Whatever you do...."

In the Bible passage from 1 Corinthians Jesus says that as Christians we actually need the weaker people: we shouldn't just tolerate them, but we need them. Paul describes them in three ways:

verse 22: the people who seem weaker

verse 23: those we think they aren't worth much

verse 23: those who don't look very nice.

Of course, he is referring to parts of the body, but it applies equally to people: we can probably all think of people we know like that, and of people like that in our church. But the Bible says that we need these people, and Paul makes a lot of it in this passage.

We need them, it seems, for two reasons:

1/ because our treatment of them shows whether or not we are putting the Bible into practice.

2/ they have functions within our church. Maybe not the the jobs we want done, maybe not spectacular functions. In our churches we all too easily focus on the big jobs - the leading of services, Churchwardens, the Organist, Treasurer - and the jobs we want people to do rather than looking for their gifts. We often try to squash people into the jobs we want done: when Kathy and I left teaching in South America we were told, "It must be right for you to go back there because there is a need for teachers." My reply was that it had to be right for us too! I can think of two examples of people carrying out small, but very worthwhile jobs in a church. At one church I was in a couple did hand-drawn posters to put outside the church, posters to advertise events or which provoked thought about the Christian faith. Another person cleaned the church lounge assiduously for years.

The Bible is very clear, though, that we have different functions. It is not true that because we all matter equally to God we are all equally capable of doing every job. That's nonsense. So I think we need to say, "That person is not suited to being on the PCC"; "She/he is not an up-front person"; "He's not good at dealing with people." And if we handle it properly, it needn't be hurtful and it shouldn't be taken as a slight. Especially if we look for things they are good at and value them for who they are as well as for the tasks they perform.

And what's all this got to do with the Holy Spirit? After all, today is Pentecost when we celebrate God sending the Holy Spirit to all believers.

- Well, this chapter is all about the Holy Spirit. He's the One who gives the gifts and who develops them in his followers.
- He's the One at work in the church wanting us to function together, guiding us, helping us, challenging us, fitting us together into one body, helping us sort out problems that occur.
- It's God's church, not ours, and the Holy Spirit's function is to give us the oomph and the grit to carry on God's work. Today, Pentecost, is the birthday of the church: God the Holy Spirit building God's church.

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