

## **Bennochy church: 13th January 2019**

I wonder what was going on in the church in Corinth? And have you ever wondered, why did Paul bother to write all these letters, that take up so much room in the New testament? Think of how much shorter the New Testament would have been, if Paul had not written to the churches. 1st Kirkcaldy, chapter 4, verse 6, says.... If Paul was writing today to the churches in Kirkcaldy, what would he say? Well, I will leave to answer that.

It must have been exciting to be in right at the very beginning of a new movement. The early days of a revolutionary new way of living. To go where no one else had gone. Exciting, but also with a real sense of danger; in Roman society, the Christian moment was hardly popular.

No matter how long something has been in existence, and how traditional it seems now, it started somewhere. With a pioneer spirit. Full of hope. A new vision for the future. Even the Church of Scotland! Throughout history, there have been moments of significant change; for example, the reformation of the 16th century, that birthed the new Protestant church.

In 1st century Palestine, did they realise, they were about to change the world. They were simply working out how to be this brand new body of people, with all the power issues, politics, and personal disputes that this would inevitably bring.

One of the main reasons that Paul wrote to the churches, was in answer to things that were going wrong. So there must have been something happening here in Corinth around spiritual gifts and the unity of the people of God in that place. So what was going on?

There must have been some people who were saying that their spiritual gifts was more important than others. My gift is bigger than your gift, so my role, will be more prominent than yours. It was all about power. It is always about power. In response, Paul clearly says, yes there are many gifts, you are right on that, and he lists some of them here, but remember this is not a complete list; Paul says, many gifts, that's true, but, there is only the one spirit. The specific gifts are not what is important here; what is important, is the unity of the body. Many gifts. One spirit. So in God's sight, everyone is equal. Without that sense of equality, there can be no unity, and without unity, the body will not function as it should. You will end up having different parts working against each other. Pulling in opposite directions. A body, that is dysfunctional, and full of 'dis-ease'.

Let me ask you the question again, "*What are you good at?*" The reason that question is so important is this. There is no one else, to do the work of the church. That's the bottom line. If we don't do it, no one else will. We can't hand the work of the church over to someone else, and abdicate our God given responsibilities.

Think about this. Why has God given Bennoch church the people it has, at this moment in time? Look around. We can't look anywhere else. We, you and I, are the people here. And thinking of this image of the body, are we a random collection of strangers, who just happen to meet on a Sunday, in the one place, or, do we intentionally gather together, to use the gifts given by God, to do the work of the church, in this community? 1st Kirkcaldy, chapter 5, verse 1. What would Paul be saying to us right now?

Paul says at the end of this section, God gives a different gift to each person. In other words, the distribution of gifts is God's choice. Not ours. And I think one of the things we struggle with here is, how to define the word 'gift'. The lists in the New Testament, vary and overlap, and are not exhaustive. So maybe we should not be constrained by them, but recognise, that any natural talent or developed skill, is also a gift from God. So, if you do not see what you are good at on Paul's list here, or elsewhere in the New Testament, don't think you have nothing to offer. You cannot get out of the work of the church that easily!

We are a jigsaw. We are a mosaic. To build a complete picture, all the pieces are required. I am doing a jigsaw at the moment. It is of Yellow Stone National Park, and can I say, it has some very odd shaped pieces and, some very small pieces, but they are all required, to complete the picture. Don't let any of us think, we

have nothing to offer. It is actually the total opposite, without all of us, the work will not be done.

It is an encouragement to know that God has given us the tools for the job. That is what Paul is saying. But... the challenge is, to accept the responsibility given to us by God. Will we rise to the occasion?

Let me finish by saying this. The work of the church, we don't do alone. We don't stand as individuals. We are all part of the body of Christ. There are many parts, but only one body. There are many parts, but only one spirit. We are many parts, and together, we will build God's mosaic, of the Kingdom of God, for all to see. Amen.