

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

23rd January 2022 – Third Sunday after Epiphany

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

All-in-One-in-Jesus

As those who work or have worked in schools know very well, at the beginning of each year there is time put aside before the students return for staff to undertake professional training (PD), something which takes on many forms. A few years ago, at the College I was at, we had a lady come in to run a day of PD for our whole staff; a school the size of St. Andrews with teachers who taught from pre-school right up to year 12.

Now, I admit I can't really remember the topic or theme of this day, but something has stayed with me about how she conducted it. At the beginning of the day she got us all to complete a personality test; you know the kind, Myers Briggs is a well know one, where you fill out some multiple choice questions to put you into a particular personality group. To me, they are ok, as long as you don't take them too seriously because I find that for many questions I could put different answers depending on who I'm with, how I'm feeling, etc. But they do give us a bit of a tool for thinking about ourselves. I think this test was called something like 'The Four Quadrants'. Once we had each completed the test and found out our quadrant, we then went and sat on a round table for the day with other staff members who were came up as being in the same personality quadrant as us.

This is where it got interesting, as we could see the different personalities on our staff and how they all fitted in. All of those who were in leadership positions ended up in the same group. Most primary school teachers ended up in the same group. Teachers of History, English and Geography were together, as were those of Maths, Science and Computing. And the Art, Music and Dance teachers all ended up in the same group. And then, the way these groups each acted during the day was the really interesting part. The people who regularly spoke up or gave input came from one group. When you looked at another of the groups they were always busily taking notes. Another group was

pretty quiet, but when they did ask a question or made a comment it was always deep and thought out. And at the end of the day our leader showed us that the large pieces of paper and textas she had put on each table had been used to make a very large and attractive poster by the group which contained all arts and creative people.

Even though I knew it already, the way that day was organised reminded me just how diverse any group of people, any organisation, any 'body', needs to be in order to be effective in what it does. It reminded me that we need all these different people, with their different personalities and their different gifts, around us and working with us. For that reason when I now hear or read Paul's words here about, 'many parts, one body', I very often think of that day.

A group works best when it doesn't just join together as an organisation, but when all of its parts, its members, work together, support all the other parts, and values and appreciates all the other parts. And the best way for this to happen is when the group has a common basis or foundation, and common goals. Mm, remind you of anything? It is because of this that in our reading for today Paul doesn't say, 'you are *like* the body', no. He writes, 'you *are* the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it' (v. 27) . Not just an organisation or a group, but Christians together make up a living, functioning organism, where each part is equally valued and needed, and all parts work together building up this body.

This is the second in our series of three Addresses looking at 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, under the theme of 'Life Together'. Last week, looking at the first half of 1 Corinthians 12, we focused on how God has given each one of us gifts to serve Him and others in our lives. Here, in the second half of chapter 12, Paul uses the well known and very effective image or analogy of calling the Church a body with many parts, reminding us that our bodies need ears and mouths and noses, hands and feet, and everything, that they are all equally important and they all work together. Like we did last week, we can guess a bit why Paul writes about this to the Christians in Corinth. It would seem that they were doing one of two things, or possibly both. There may well have been some people who were seeing their gifts and contributions to the community as being more important, so wanted to have a

more prominent place and perhaps more say in decision making. It is also possible that these people put down or disregarded the gifts or contributions of others, or that some saw their own gifts as being worthless and unimportant, and maybe even looked with wistfulness and yearning at the people who were doing the 'important stuff'. Paul's message to them, in this simple but effective illustration he uses: just like a body needs all of its parts, and one part can't say it doesn't need the others, so too Jesus' body, the Church, needs all of its parts, and all are equally important.

That kind of putting yourself up and pushing others down might have happened in the early Church, but it doesn't happen now, does it? Mmm. We all know the answer to that. And so, Paul's message to the Corinthians 2,000 years ago is the same message to us today. What we are given here is the ideal we, as people who are together baptised by the Spirit into this body, so it's God work not ours, the ideal for us individually and together to be aiming for. And that is that we value our differences, because they are what makes us who we are. Our differences make us what we are to one another, and enable us to be more effective in carrying God's love out as a community. At times, the differences of others might, probably will, frustrate us, but we know that in any relationship, no matter how close or wide it is, differences are needed for both individuals and the group, and the body, to grow. These differences in personalities, ages, gifts, interests, opinions, are God given, and just like variety and difference in our human bodies is necessary these differences among us also make us who we are as the body of Jesus.

And with these differences comes our call; as a wider Christian Church and as individual Christian communities we do need you. Last week we were reminded that we've all been given gifts to serve, this week is the call to see both our gifts and the gifts of others as being important, and to use them as part of our work in Jesus' body. As people who are created and loved by God, and who know that Jesus died and rose again so we can have new life in Him, our call is to both support those who share this belief with us and to help others to come to know it also. Reflecting on the message here is a good time to think about our call. In the past year or so our congregation here at St. Andrews has lost some very faithful servants of the body of Jesus; people who filled many roles in the congregation,

who were always quick to volunteer and help out, who were generous financial supporters in many ways. There are others here who have done these things for a long time, and who now either need a break or could do with help in their service. Only you know what you are able to do, but know that you have been gifted to serve, whether in a formal or informal way, whether inside or outside the Church community. To continue to build up and grow this community which is a part of the body of Jesus, we need to each see ourselves as being a member who is important and can contribute, and we also need to make sure we do whatever we can to make sure others feel like this also.

I told you that story about that College PD Day at the beginning, because it was such a reminder to me, and I hope all our staff there, that each one of us with all of our differences was needed in order for that College to be effective in educating and forming young people in the best way possible. If we took out or disregarded one of those groups, the rest of us would not be able to cover them and perform their roles as effectively. That's also Paul's point to us here as he uses the image of the body to remind us that we are all different, that those differences are both God given and needed, and that because of our baptism we are now all-in-one-in-Jesus. Seek and value your gifts, and look for ways you can use them as part of this body, God's Kingdom. Seek and value the gifts of others, and encourage and support them in what they do. Know that it is Jesus' body; He formed it, He brings us into it, He sustains it, and that ultimately its life and work come through Him. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Like we did last week, reflect on the gifts, talents, interests, and abilities God has given you. How has He called you to use them as part of His body? Are there other ways He is calling you to use them?
- Think about the gifts, talents, interests, and abilities God has given to people around you. How can you support and encourage them as they serve as members of Jesus' body?
- Consider any Christian communities you are a part of. Is there anything which is affecting their unity as the body of Christ? Are there any factors preventing them from working more effectively as Jesus' body? Pray for your community/communities, asking God to help you to see your role in building one another up and working together to share His love with the world.

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