

Sunday January 26th

St Paul's First letter to the Corinthians. Chapter 12, verses 12 to 30.

In our reading this morning the apostle Paul wrote the letter to the church of Corinth, a city which then had a reputation for immorality and corruption. The church was struggling under these influences and had begun to divide over various issues. Paul wrote to them to address some serious issues about the church that had been reported to him, but also to respond to some concerns that the church had.

Paul writes to the church to explain who the church is and what it should be doing: that it should put Jesus first and foremost, that it should be a church working together to deal with any problems or differences and not to take these issues to the outside world. That the church should glorify God in all that it does.

Paul writes about spiritual gifts within the context of the whole church of God, which he called the Body of Christ, and the use and purpose of these spiritual gifts within the church.

He writes that:

- There is One Body with many members
- There is One Spirit with many gifts and functions
- The Body and the Gifts have a purpose

We aren't living in Corinth in those times, we are in rural Norfolk with 15 churches in our benefice, but we can still learn a lot from Paul's letter.

Paul compares the body of Christ to a human body where each part of the human body has a specific function that is necessary for the body to work as a whole. The individual parts are different for a purpose and all parts must work together.

Paul emphasises the importance of each church member. If a seemingly insignificant part is taken away, the whole body is less effective.

During my working life I was always part of a team with others working early, late or night shifts, with responsibility for serving our local community. We all had the same purpose to serve and protect the community but we all had different strengths and skills. Without this variety of skill sets the team was

less effective. As a team we celebrated our successes and we were jointly saddened by failures.

A football team has a similar set up. It is united to try and win football matches. It needs goalkeepers, defenders, midfielders and strikers for the team to succeed. The various positions must work in harmony to be successful, and if a player is sent off, the team is less effective.

So the church is really no different. The church is comprised of many types of people from a variety of backgrounds and a multitude of skills and abilities and gifts. All believers have one thing in common, which is faith in Christ. We are all baptised by one Holy Spirit into one body of believers: The Church.

We keep our identity as individuals but we have a oneness in Christ.

In verses 21 & 22 Paul says that the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

He says that to disregard a member of the church would be like disregarding a member of our own body. The church would be missing an important part and not be whole.

There should no sense of superiority or inferiority in the church, for we are all members of the same body, the Body of Christ. Each member is needed to be the complete body.

So Church we too are a team.

We may have heard the acronym **TEAM: Together Each Achieves More.**

Or sayings like - 'There's no I in team!'

Or 'Team work makes the dream work!'

We all have a part to play in the Body of Christ, no one is less or more important than the others. Our benefice has people in many roles: clergy, worship leaders, pastoral assistants. Those who have a position in church are not more important than anyone else. We are all part of the same team, the Body of Christ, the Church!

Whatever we may think, we all have our own gifts, skills and knowledge and every single member has a part to play in our Church. Our worship would not have been so lovely without the skills of our musicians, our arrival in church this morning would have been so welcoming without those who greet us on arrival or who prepare the church for us and we would miss the after service refreshment without those who offer their gifts to prepare it. All of these things are needed to make our service happen for us to come together to worship.

We all need each another, we can hold one another, support each other and rejoice together.

Getting together to talk, praying together and coming together because we are all part of the Body of Christ. We are all part of the family of God, we are all part of the church. We are blessed that God has given the believer spiritual gifts. In the three years that we have been involved in this benefice, we have met the majority of people in the congregations of the various churches. We have been blessed by the warm welcome and the love and support from everyone and, despite the geography of our benefice, there is a strong unity and sense of a 'team' sharing one vision and a love of God.

Amen

GW 26.1.25