

## **SERMON: Sunday – 30 May 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **A people Gifted By the Spirit**

**1 Corinthians 12:1-12**

**1 Corinthians 14:26-33**

GA - radical, reducing numbers of ministers, parishes, new ways of mission, what it means to practise faith.....

There was quite a lot of talk about what I might call the church coming into it's oneness, it's one body-ness.

The NT speaks of one body with each given specific gifts to build up that one body.

The gift is given for a purpose - to build up one another as a body.

As Paul puts it in chapter 12, a spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.

GA tried to get us to see a unified picture of the church in Scotland - not individual congregations competing for survival as it can often feel like.

We can apply that human tendency on a smaller level when we Christians sometimes forget the bigger picture of us being one body together and how mutually dependent we are on the Holy Spirit at work in all of us.

Loving one another is the hallmark of how we are to exist together.

And it can work the other way. Even the GA perhaps can get too focussed on the survival of our one denomination rather than to see things more ecumenically.

There were signs of that, eg, where a congregation is struggling to survive in an area that we might look beyond the denominational badge and see the presence of other flavours of churches as being as important as if it were our own and to honour that in somehow working together as one.

With an ever reducing number of congregations the C of S has no alternative but to look at working with other denominations.

Who knows? By not doing so, we may be missing out on the fullness of the Spirit.

My reading of 1 Corinthians 12 through to 14 is that if everyone one, individual as well as collections of individuals in congregations, is gifted with unique spiritual gifts, then it follows that even if one person is missing then that one person's gift is missing, and the church is weaker as a result.

There are, by implication, myriads of spiritual gifts out there waiting to be put to work within the church.

Surely, if everyone has a gift, then it follows that the more people in the church the more gifted the church is.

Likewise, if there are people missing, then there are gifts missing.

How can the church tap into the missing gifts?

Part of the answer of course is to do what God does, in other words to join in with God's mission, to be missional, missionary minded.

Again, the GA is totally sold into that idea, that mission must be at the heart of everything the church does.

Mission, from the simplest prayer on behalf of someone else, to a smile, a kind word, a caring act, or any other of the gifts Paul describes in 1 Corinthians - wise advice, special knowledge, faith, healing the sick, miracle working, prophecy, discerning spirits, speaking in different languages, interpreting them. And so on and so on.

All of these are needed. Are we seeing them all in the church? Not yet.

All of these gifts and more are what is needed to make up the body of many parts, made effective in love, the greatest of all the gifts and the fuel that makes them effective.

As Paul says in 14:1, love is the greatest gift and our highest goal.

I've often been challenged by readings these chapters, perhaps especially when it comes to chapter 14, the section on orderly worship which Janice read to us.

There is advice there for how churches are to gather. I find that if I compare what is written to what we do in practise, that there isn't a lot of comparison.

One sings, one teaches, one has a revelation, one speaks in tongues, one interprets, 2 or 3 prophesy.

That amounts to something between 8 and 10 active participants in a worship time together.

How did we ever get to church being too often about one (or perhaps 2 or 3) people leading from the front?

We might blame the reformation and its insistence on the right preaching of the Word and the correct administration of the sacraments. Do we need a new reformation? Or an ongoing one?

Ekklesia reformanda semper reformata?

Where are the apostles, the miracle workers, the prophets, to compliment the teachers, the pastors, the helpers, the encouragers?

As we sang earlier, do we need another Pentecost? Send the fire today Lord.

That's where we begin, with heartfelt cries to our God who is for us and with us.

The Spirit lives to set us free, all of us together. Let's pray that our worship and our witness is continually freed up so that we might truly be the people gifted by the Spirit that we are and that we might see the oneness and the fullness of the body in our midst.