

## Seeing the Big Picture.... Love"

Texts: Jeremiah 1:4-10

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (Series C, 4<sup>th</sup> Epiphany) Ps.71:1-6

Luke 4:21-30

Prayer:

Today's second lesson is continuation from last week's reading regarding the gifts of the Spirit, Paul takes us further into the composition of the Body of Christ as created by God. Comforted and strengthened by the knowledge of the Lord's presence within himself and us.

He begins with the reminder that *we were all baptized into one body...and made to drink of one spirit. "The body of Christ has many different parts, just as any other body does. Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. .... But God's Spirit baptized each of us and made us part of the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:12,13).*

Paul is right when he points out that the church is strange mixture of all kinds of people. Just take a look at us here in this church this morning. Everyone is different, with different looks. With different personalities,

- different ages,
- different backgrounds,
- different jobs or professions,
- different upbringings culturally or otherwise,
- different hobbies, and tastes,
- different levels of spiritual maturity,
- and all the other things that mark one person different to the other.

On any given Sunday in this holy, and apostolic church, we might have disgruntled church hoppers, visitors from other Provinces and even overseas, newcomers to town, new converts to Christ, the spiritually lost returning to God, long time members, babies and children.

You won't find too many other organizations that gather every week with such a mixture of people. How do we all fit together? How did so many different people get to be part of the one church?

When Paul talks about the body of Christ referring to the church, he means not only the narrower meaning of the word "*church*" (the local congregation) but also the wider meaning that includes all Christians around the globe.

How do we all fit together? Paul was writing to the Corinthians. Now if there ever was a bunch of people who found it difficult to get along, it was the congregation at Corinth.

There were all kinds of disagreements, some thinking they were better than the others because they have money, and their position in society, some feeling as if they had no place in the congregation, back biting, gossip. Much like any congregation today really –

- there are those whose leadership is resented,
- those who always seem to end doing everything,
- others who feel inadequate when it came to doing anything in the church,
- those who feel no one talks to them or like them,
- others who are upset over what someone else has said or done,
- some who never say anything but harbour grudges and resentments,
- others who want change, and others who resent it,
- and those who like the pastor and those who don't. the list can go on and on....

Paul was writing to a congregation much like this congregation or any other congregation. Because of the upsets caused by the differences in people Paul writes to the Corinthians and us, describing the togetherness in *Love* that is *characteristic* of the true church.

He tells us that the church is like the human body. Even though the body is made up of different and diverse organs it all functions together as one body. When we were baptized, the Holy Spirit made us part of this *one, holy, and apostolic* church.

We are *not* just members of the church but joined together in such a way that even though God has given each of us different gifts, nevertheless all of us in God's eyes are equally "*important*" in his church.

Paul points out that God put the body together in such a way that one part looks after another, and that the whole body is affected when one part is hurt. That's precisely what Paul was getting at. When one is hurt, all feel it and will provide the *help, encouragement, support* and *guidance* that are needed.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a letter to encourage a congregation that was in disarray. For me, of the four appointed readings for this Sunday, the significance of the reading from 1 Corinthians (13: 1-14) cannot be understated. It is so very much more than a pretty thing to recite at a marriage celebration or at a funeral.

In the context of all the readings for this Sunday, it brings the Word to *now*, to *our time*, to *our space*. I see it as a blueprint of our *inner spiritual selves*, our *internal faith home*, where some rooms are still under construction in our lives.

As we look outside in this complex world, there is no denying the *dissension, hatred, intolerance*, and *rage* in seemingly every facet of human life through war, religion, race, gender, and so much more.

There is a disharmony of clanging voices of politicians and power mongers disparaging everyone who is not one of them. Their supporters and detractors escalate the decibels to unbearable levels where few have a clear tone, or a calming demeanor that defuses the raging.

But, turning inside, if we listen, we can hear, as so many have sung, *All You Need is Love, Love is the Answer, How Deep is Your Love, Endless Love, I Just Called to Say I Love You, etc., etc., etc.* Love is the ultimate goal of all human endeavor, the path to eternal life.

When the anger is boiling, when the resentment seeps in, when irritation begins its mixing, let us take a breath and discover a more excellent way to live. Let us first seek ways to experience love and acceptance from within ourselves for ourselves.

God is our *refuge* and our *strength* to grow and to act consciously with confidence in faith, in hope, and especially and intentionally, to live with and by *love*. Easy? Of course not, but building a room one floorboard at a time moves us closer to a solid foundation to stand in faith, and strengthens our outside community that grows in love.

Love doesn't mean agreement in all things. It does mean acceptance and tolerance of the differences that divide and welcoming the caring that connects.

Love may not solve all problems but it will make a positive difference in everyone it dwells. "Home is where the heart is", said Roman author and philosopher Pliny the Elder, who was about 10 years old when Jesus was crucified. Let's set our hearts on each other and through the Christ within us, we can build a loving home (world) for us all.

Unconditional Acceptance. That's precisely the message of Jesus Christ. People need to see the whole picture in order to appreciate the Spirit of Christianity. The Gospel picture is very clear: every person comes into being as an object of God's Love.

No exceptions! No equivocation! God loves us and he loves our spouse. He loves our children and all our relatives and in-laws included. He loves our neighbors and our friends, and our acquaintances.

He loves every single human being who is a stranger to us. He loves our enemies, he loves those we agree with, and do not agree with. Take even one person out of the picture and we take the God who is present to us in Jesus Christ out of the picture.

The message of the Gospel is unmistakably clear: because God's love is universal so too must be ours. No exceptions! No equivocation! Take even one person out of the picture and the Christ Spirit is lost to us. We become spiritually crippled.

So, my brothers and sisters, let's never let ourselves settle for less than this. Let's never forget that this is the most important thing we can work on, because without it, everything else is just noise and busywork. "Love is that thing which, if a church has it, it doesn't really need much else, and if it doesn't have it, whatever else it has doesn't really matter very much".

Love is eternal. Love is essential. You want to know what Love is. Look at Jesus, and especially look at his body broken and his blood shed for us. He is the eternal, unconditional self - sacrificial love of God in the flesh!

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon us.** He has sent us to be healers, reconcilers. He has sent us to show the world the big picture, the true picture, the whole picture of the Spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which Love. **Amen.**