

Churches Together in Beverley ...

... varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit

A sermon given in Beverley Minster on the Second Sunday of Epiphany - 19th January 2025, by the Revd Fran Rhys from Toll Gavel United Church.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

I'd say that Churches Together in Beverley is in fairly good shape. Of course, we can always hope and work for more active cooperation between the churches and I've heard animated memories about the mystery plays put on in Beverley some 15 years ago. More recently, there's been the initiative and purchase of a Hope in Action house to house and support a family which would otherwise be homeless as a result of domestic violence or abuse. Between the eco-groups here at the Minster and at Toll Gavel United Church, there's been mutual inspiration and support for events and education and pursuing a Rocha Award. From mid-February, there will be an ecumenical youth alpha course hosted through the Armstrong Centre, the Baptist Church in Beverley. Today, as Eileen said, to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we have pulpit swaps among the 10 or so churches here in Beverley. I value meeting together with ordained colleagues up to twice a month over our packed lunches, and nearly the full spectrum of church leaders attend these meetings, from Catholic to Assemblies of God, that's Kings Church, and Beverley Community Church, if we're thinking about the oldest to the youngest churches.

The passage from 1 Corinthians 12 speaks among others about the gift of the working of miracles. Some miracles take longer to come to fruition than others and we can take them for granted. Compared to what happened before the 20th century, the past 100 years have seen a very significant coming together of different churches, which has been in part inspired by events in other countries where there are united or uniting churches. The section of Paul's letter to the Corinthians Christian congregation that we heard written in about the year 55 describes other gifts of the Spirit apart from working miracles. These include wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, and speaking and interpreting of tongues and languages. The list that Paul gives isn't meant to be exhaustive, but rather some examples of the way that we can recognise the Holy Spirit at work. Arguably, we can see the gifts of wisdom and knowledge more clearly in older mainline churches. Can we see faith and healing more at work within younger churches or services such as the @915 service here at the Minister, appealing more to families with younger children (although you're not doing badly at the 11:00 service either)? Of course, my

categorising is a bit simplistic - many people have sustained a lifetime of faith and healing, and that's a wonderful thing too.

As many of you will be aware, the Methodist Church from which I come was itself a renewal movement within the Church of England in the 18th century - renewal movements are always needed - the 'Fresh Expressions of Church' movement was initiated around the new millennium by several different denominations. All gifts are needed for God to be amply glorified, for the common good to be served. Later in chapter 12 of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he provides the image of the body and how all parts of the body are needed for the body to function. This imagery of the body is a non-hierarchical kind of imagery because the body's working is a cooperative conglomeration. A Methodist biblical scholar and former president Neil Richardson suggests that when we see diversity and unity simultaneously at work, that's a good sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The 36th Psalm that is for today helps express this: *'How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.'*

Recently, I was listening to a thoughtful newcomer to church and faith. Her observation was that in sermons, as preachers can take for granted that people will know what they're referring to with comments like 'people speaking in tongues' was something that people took for granted more in the first century. She said, "I don't know anything about this. I need the book, Christianity for Dummies." Some of us can forget the kinds of different knowledge and faith we might carry around with us, and renewal movements may help to discern where the Spirit is working more freely in the world than in the church, and remind us to seek to bridge the gaps. One of the 12 points in the Methodist 'Way of life' is to look and listen for God in scripture and in the world. The Church of England has its equivalents, such as the five marks of mission.

In Paul's list of gifts of the Holy Spirit, he includes the discernment of spirits. This has been described as trying to identify what is real and what is actually more like hysteria; what is genuine or what's excited delusion. There was a party in the early New Year at the Methodist Church in the Beverley area which has the largest number of families with school age or young adult children. It's tempting to describe the party as a bit hysterical at times. So I realise we have to be discerning about our own prejudices as well. The previous Chapter 11 in the first letter to the Corinthians has a lot of content related to first-century life. Women are told to cover their heads; men not to let their hair grow long; a man is described as the head of a woman. We know that certainly in most Anglican and Methodist churches, we have discerned that these are spirits of an earlier age. Church of England churches can now offer blessings for couples of the same sex; Methodist churches can offer marriage to couples of the same sex. For this movement forward, I give great thanks for how it serves our diversity of experience. As Paul

says, 'There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.'

In this year's Week of Prayer for Christian in unity (which has some good devotional material online - although I know this is a special week for you too, for your vision strategy) - let us recommit ourselves to recognising the different gifts present through our different churches, the wisdom and knowledge, the faith and healing, the prophecy, and the working of miracles.

If you are free this evening at 6:30, come along to a Church's Together service at Toll Gavel United Church, where this year's theme of our common life will be explored.

Reading Text

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.