

2024 TALK FOR CAREY, 3.11.24, 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-6/7-14

VALUING YOUNG PEOPLE, VALUING ALL PEOPLE...

Today's talk is the 2nd in this short series which picks up one each of our four new mission statements. You will realise I am taking them in reverse order. I'm nothing if not a perverse human being & an awkward northern so-and-so !... But that's enough about me... Let's remind each other of the four mission statements agreed by our church. We are called by God to: (SCREEN)

- **Live out our faith**, providing Christ-centred, Bible-based ministry to nurture our spiritual growth.
- **Open our arms to our community**, using opportunities to share God's love.
- **Value children & y.p.**, nurturing their hearts in faith & wholeness in Christ.
- **Engage as good stewards of God's creation**, preserving our environment through our church actions & individual lifestyle choices.

Now some of you might be thinking: how does our Bible reading from 1 Corinthians 12 relate to our theme today: valuing young people, valuing all people...? TBH, I had been wondering this, when I first started to prepare this talk. But then, I realised something. & God reminded me of a number of things.

What I realised was this: I particularly appreciate Paul insisting, in 1 Corinthians 12, that there are all kinds of different gifts. Or perhaps a better way of putting this: There are a whole manner of 'out-workings' of God's Spirit, within the body of Christ. He writes: 'There are different kinds of working, but in all of them & in everyone it is the same God at work'. Alleluia !

Now this reminded me of the message from 'Word for Today' on Thursday of this week... But not in a good way... I know some of you read these daily devotional reflections produced by United Christian Broadcasters. Usually, I find these messages inspiring & thoughtful. I don't always agree with the message... And on Thursday I had a particularly strong reaction to that day's message. I found myself profoundly disagreeing with the thoughts of the late Bob Gass (& his wife Debby). - But I do still bless Bob & Debby for the way God uses their words to encourage & challenge me & many fellow believers, every day...

In answering the question, 'How do we love God with all our strength?', Bob Gass used some words of another pastor: 'Loving God means expending

tremendous amounts of energy for Kingdom causes...' And he talked later of 'experiencing the holy rush of adrenaline' in 'breaking sweat to serve others'. I get the point. But I couldn't help thinking: 'What about those who don't have a lot of energy? What about those who don't have much opportunity to serve others?'... I was thinking of people with poor health. People who are housebound, for eg. People who are in prison. And then I got to thinking of two groups of people, at the opposite ends of the age spectrum: Those who are old & frail. & those who are in their youngest years, who can also be thought of as not having much to ***immediately*** contribute to our wider society.

This brings us in a roundabout way, to the current, public debate about assisted dying. I do hear the legitimate concerns of those calling for assisted dying in certain situations. But I also hear the concern of the Archbishop of Canterbury, & others, about the dangers of introducing an expectation of euthanasia for certain groups of people. I would hope that, as a nation, we can find a way through both of these opposing & undertsandable fears. But I digress...

Here's the thing. If the gospel of Jesus teaches us anything it is this: we value people not for what they can do, not for what they can bring to the party, but ***for who they are***. If our churches place too much emphasis on the energy & the gifting people can bring to a particular job, then we run the risk of only really valuing those with gifts & energy. Of course Paul is saying something different here in 1 Corinthians 12, and elsewhere in some of his other letters. Some of the gifts, or workings of God, are not outwardly obvious. Like the gifts of faith, or the gift of discernment, for eg. And in Romans 14, Paul talks of the need to give 'special consideration' to those among us who are 'weaker'. Hmm.

'Discrimination' is both a positive & a negative word. I remember during the 'Black Lives Matter' protests, some people were saying that surely 'all lives matter' ...? This is of course true. But it is also true that there are times when special attention needs to be given to particular groups who are being overlooked or even mis-treated. Of course it's not true that children & y.p. are being overlooked by Carey. We have called a CYF Worker. & we take seriously Safeguarding our children & young people. But I do think that in our wider society, the needs of our young people are too often overlooked. I'm also deeply conscious that the needs of older people need much attention too. This is not a competition. It is instead a case of 'both/and', of us having a vision which sees both young & old as equally valuable to God.

The subject of our third mission statement, our focus on children & young people, was the 'starting gun' for our church beginning this process of thinking about what our church's future mission might look like. Carey once again employing a CYF Worker has had a number of important effects on our church. Firstly, it has challenged us financially. And continues to challenge us. But it has resulted in the growth our Toddler group, our Children's Church & our Youth Church. And it has I believe, raised bigger questions about what God is calling our church to become in the future. In effect, our thinking about our mission to children & y.p., has been leading our thinking about our wider mission.

Together we look to God, to give us vision for the way ahead, to help us in our mission to the people of Hemel & beyond. It feels like we need to believe God for a miracle. To help us find a way of valuing & celebrating both young & not so young. To find a way for Carey to communicate a life-giving message for existing generations, as well as future, yet-to-be-born generations.

The body of Christ in every age is a visible reminder of the good news of Jesus. This good news is a message of life & hope for all. That everyone of us, whether we have specific gifts - or not; whether or not we have lots of energy & time - or not. If we have money to offer. If we have much to offer... Or if we feel we come empty-handed & at the end of ourselves... However, we come, we come to a God of grace & peace, who equally & open-heartedly welcomes all & values all. Thanks be to God for the good news of Jesus...!

As Jesus said: 'Blessed are the poor (and the poor in spirit), for theirs is the Kingdom of God'. Jesus also said: 'God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor'. Jesus also said: 'I have come that people might have life – life in all its fullness'. Thanks be to God, for the supreme gift of Jesus - & for the many gifts of God's good earth & God's life-giving Spirit ! Alleluia !

Jesus made a point of welcoming & blessing little children. Jesus also made a point of celebrating the widow who placed two copper coins in the Temple offering. LORD help us to value all people for who they are. LORD help us, in the heart of this community, to be a people who, in different ways, show the wonder of your wonder-working love.