

Immanuel, Sunday 16th January 2022

1 Corinthians 12; 1-11

The Common Good...???

Today we celebrated an important moment in the life of a family, and for the life of the church family – Harry was baptised and parents, godparents and congregation in different ways all committed to living life in such a way that Harry can grow up experiencing the love of God. This is, indeed, a happy day. A celebration for quite several different reasons.

A baptism is what reminds me more than so many other moments in the life of a church that what we do is not centred on us alone, it is part of a wider and more involved reality – which for today I will call “the others”, because at a baptism we have a child who is small, who doesn’t have the opportunity of expressing their own views, parents who “speak” for the child, Godparents who play a special role to help parents remain grounded, the wider family that celebrates the moment, and a congregation that is challenged to stretch its boundaries.

So, the reading today is a great one to help us bring all this together. It reminds us that everything we have read about has one, and only one sense to it: **the common good**. In a world such as ours, in our time, speaking of common good seems to raise more questions than anything else; so, does it make any sense? We are pushed in so many different ways toward the private/personal gain, where others become steppingstones for personal gain. But in faith we can only have one response to such a view – that is not our way, our way is different because it is sustained on the concept of the Common Good.

In its long history Christianity has been an amazing agent of change for good, transforming lives, opening doors and windows, giving a sense of fullness of life and hope. And in that same long history Christianity -as so many other of the world religions – has shown us many malfunctions. What is this all about then? Well, let us try to unpack this reading and see how it stretches our understanding and challenges our lifestyle.

The early church was deeply concerned about diversity, particularly in those areas which they recognised coming from God. Wouldn’t diversity be confusing? Wouldn’t it be better for all to be similar?

Sometimes we read words in the Bible which we find particularly tough: when you were pagans. And you know what, that’s not what Paul wrote, it’s a choice word of the translators. Paul refers to when they were Gentiles – simply meaning different from Jews, because what we now know as Christianity had not yet developed.

And then Paul develops the whole concept of “spiritual gifts” as a mark of the church.

- **A variety of gifts, but the same Spirit,**
- **A variety of services, but the same Lord,**
- **A variety of activities, but the same God,**

To **each** is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the **common good**. The church, which plays a role in society, is formed of many members, and we are all different; we have all received different expressions of the Spirit, but these are not meant for private use and

appropriation. They are for the common good, which goes far and wide, and beyond who we are as a church. Faith is a personal matter, no doubt; but it is not an individualist matter, on the contrary, faith is a common matter. Whether we realise it or not, people will discover what Christianity is through what we do and are: the good and the bad. So, our standing as part of the common good is essential, basic, CRUCIAL.

Today we have received a new member to the family of the church, done through Immanuel but part of the worldwide church. And Harry has received and will receive gifts, which he will grow into. Our role as church here today, and we have promised this, it to be agents for Harry to be able to develop those gifts he has received, in the same way as each of us should be able to develop our own received gifts. That Harry's parents and family can be confident that they will find respect, comfort, support in us. That we all come together receiving the benefit of those gifts, and that as part of God's family in the world, we dedicate those gifts to the common good.

The possession of any gift is not a matter of individual merit or even worthiness, but of the free grace of God. Those gifts are not to be kept under lock and key for our personal benefit but rather to be shared generously for the benefit of the common good. Sadly, as I mentioned at the beginning, there have been many malfunctions over the centuries: too often Christians became selfish in our living, creating barriers, building walls, excluding others, marginalising many... history has shown that Christianity can be intolerant, bigoted, discriminatory, feel cultural superiority, gender biased, different sexual orientation excluding, not too sympathetic to difference, even indifferent to ethnic conflicts, ceased to be healing and restorative, and where the common good has been trampled on.

This reading challenges us to think seriously about how we would like to be known? and even how we are known. A baptism is a wonderful moment in the life of a faith community, because it invites us to take a deep look at ourselves, to correct things that should not be there, and to affirm those which are the best. Because this best, is what we have received from God, what God has shared with us, we share with others, unreservedly. We are all God's children in this world, to make this world a better place.

May our gifts be generously shared for the common good. Amen