

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Seeking God's Vision 3: Looking In

Enville & Kinver 23rd June 2024

Today we are continuing our sermon series on Seeking God's Vision. We started by Looking Up, thinking about how we can't seek God's Vision if we don't first seek God.

Then last week we were Looking Out, thinking about how as we Seek God's Vision for our communities, our nation, our world, our starting assumption has to be that God is already there, already working, and our task is to see what God is doing and join in where we can.

If you missed either of those sermons you can listen to them both on St Peter's website and you can download the texts and some discussion questions as well.

All of this is leading up to our Weekend Away at the Church Hall next weekend, where we'll be Looking Forward as we Seek God's Vision together for our Benefice.

But before we come on to that, today we're going to be Looking In, as we think about Seeking God's Vision for our lives.

And to start us off I want you to have a think for a few minutes about things that make your heart sing, things that you are really good at, things that you love doing, things that make you feel alive.

Now I want you to have a think about things that make your heart sink, things that you may have to do but that you find unintuitive, things that you know other people are much better at than you are.

When we were planning today's service we thought about trying to get everyone to try and find someone who contrasts with them, so for example someone for whom computers makes their heart sing could find someone for whom computers makes their heart sink but trying to work out the logistics of that made my heart sink so we gave up on that idea!

But the point is that we are all different. I can almost guarantee that no two people here will have exactly the same things in both lists. We are all different, we're good at different things and we struggle with different things.

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Church in Corinth they were divided. They were arguing about all sorts of things, and trying to one-up each other.

And Paul gives them an image that has resonated throughout Christian thinking ever since. He says:

“Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts.”

He tells a kind of comic parable about the different parts of the body fighting with each other – the ear says to the eye “I’m not like you so I must not belong to the body”, the head says to the feet “I don’t need you, you can get lost”. It’s over the top, it’s absurd because of course that’s not how bodies work

Then he goes on to say the key line which is this:

“You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

In our difference lies our strength. In our diversity lies our unity. And so when we think about Seeking God’s Vision for our lives, we have to see that in its wider context.

It’s too easy, too tempting, to compare ourselves to each other. She’s much better than me at this, he’s much better than me at that. Or, to go the other way, to criticise others – He ought to be better at this, she ought to be better at that.

But Paul reminds us that we are responsible to each other, we are part of the same body – the body of Christ. And so we should always be trying to encourage each other, build each other up, be kind and respectful to each other because we need each other.

And sometimes that means being challenged by or learning from the people who we least expect.

For Jews in Jesus’s day, the people from neighbouring Samaria, well they were hated, despised, looked down upon as unclean and impure. When Jesus told that well known parable of what we now call the “Good Samaritan” he was challenging those assumptions. And they are assumptions that we all hold in different ways.

It seems to me that far too much of the rhetoric in the runup to the election revolves around the idea that certain groups of people are beyond the pale – whether that’s migrants and refugees, the wealthy, or just anyone who votes for a different party.

And yet Jesus challenges those attitudes in the parable about the Samaritan, just as Paul does in his image of the Body of Christ, because whatever our differences, we need each other, we can learn from each other, we can help each other. We are the body of Christ.

And if one part of the body is hurting then we all hurt with them. And if one part of the body is rejoicing then we all rejoice with them.

So how do we Seek God’s Vision for our lives? We start by not seeing ourselves in isolation, but rather by seeing ourselves as part of the Body of Christ.

And then we can begin building one another up in love. Encouraging each other, supporting each other, strengthening each other. Saying something when you notice someone doing something well, or encouraging someone when you think there’s something that they might be good at.

So often we are the last person to acknowledge our own strengths and gifts, but we all have strengths, we all have gifts, because we are all made by God. Everybody has something to offer, even the people we least expect, or the people we've been conditioned to look down on. We are the body of Christ, and each one of us is a part of it.

And so I want you to look at those lists again, the things that make your heart sing and the things that make your heart sink.

What difference does it make to think about those things that make your heart sing as being gifts from God? Things that make the Body of Christ better and stronger because you bring them to the table.

And what difference does it make, looking at those things that make your heart sink, to think that you are part of the Body of Christ, and those same things will be on somebody else's list as things that make their heart sing?

We are the body of Christ and we need each other. And as we Seek God's Vision for our lives, individually and collectively, as we see every member of the Body of Christ grow in their gifts, grow in their strengths, then we will see the whole Body of Christ growing together. We are the body of Christ, and every single one of us is a vital, valuable, beloved part of it.

Amen.