

## 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 The church as a body

The miracle of the church

- What sort of group are we as a church? Were we all born in Knaphill, so that this is a group of 'Knaphillians'?
- Were we all educated in the same institution and did we all have the same degree in school or at Uni?
- Are we all English?
- Are we all of the same age?
- Do we all participate in playing bowls?
- Are we all musical and when we sing, we are all in tune and form a real choir?
- Are we all technical and able to use computers?
- Do we all love dogs and cats?

NO! Nothing of this! So: we are not a social group, with the same hobbies and of the same age, or....

- So: why are we here and why do we gather every Sunday?
- 1 Corinthians 12 gives the answer: as believers we all belong to Christ. When we confessed Him as Lord, we all received the Holy Spirit. And that Spirit binds us together, so that we look like one body.
- This is of course a metaphor, an image: we are not literally one body, we all have our own body. But the apostle Paul makes it clear in this passage that there is an invisible tie that binds us together. We belong to the body of Christ. We believe in Him and love Him and that common love for Jesus, which we share, binds us together.
- So we belong together, we are like one body, Paul says. And he says that for a reason in this letter to the church in Corinth. In Corinth, there were all kinds of gifts of the Holy Spirit: speaking in tongues, gifts of healing, prophesying. In particular the extra-ordinary gifts, the ones people found spectacular, such as speaking in tongues. And what should not happen, did happen: people with spectacular gifts thought they were better than the others who didn't have those gifts. And those not speaking in tongues or prophesying (and so on) thought they were of minor value in the church. It seemed as if some parts of the body of the church were more important than others!
- Paul addresses this issue in this passage. He says: 'Now you (all of you, he means) are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.' (verse 27)
- It is not the case – as people in Corinth thought – that one member of the church is more important than the other, because they speak in tongues, or prophesy, or show any other gift. We are all needed in the body! Everyone with their own gift which we received from God. We all received the Holy Spirit when we came to faith. It's not that God gave less of his Spirit to certain people and more to others, as if having the gift of tongues for instance means you have the Holy Spirit and you are more 'spiritual', whereas others who don't speak in tongues are less spiritual.
- Everyone is needed and every gift is important in the body of Christ = the church. Nobody can say: I am more important than you are, because I can preach. Or; I am less important than you are, because I just attend church, but I cannot play the piano. Or: I can only serve others, but I cannot teach the Bible. All gifts are important and we need each one of you to function properly.
- Paul illustrates this. Our physical body has many parts. You cannot miss a foot without noticing it! We are more or less disabled if we miss a foot, or if our foot is dysfunctional. No, our feet are needed, our hand are needed, you notice that best if one of your body parts is not functioning.
- Paul makes his point clear by having the different parts of the body talk to each other: verse 15 – the foot: I'm not a hand. The ear: I'm not an eye; the eye says: I don't need you, hand! The head cannot say to the feet: I don't need you! In fact, Paul says, all parts are needed. And: it's even the case that if one part suffers, the whole body suffers. The opposite is true as well: if one part is honoured, every part rejoices in it. So: there is no place for jealousy!
- In the same way: every part of the body of Christ, of the church, is needed. No part is superior or inferior. Whatever gift we have, we are needed, otherwise the body cannot function well.
- The church: a miracle. A community we need as believers – a community where everyone is needed, in order for the church to function as God intended it to be.
- It's good to emphasize this in a time of individualism and in a time when Covid-19 hit our country. In a time when it's so easy to forget the community of believers. There was a time when we could

not come to church physically because of lockdown and I've heard several pastors say they worry about people who seemed to have disappeared altogether. Maybe these people, who used to come to church, went 'shopping' online for different churches or they don't participate at all anymore. It seemed to be so easy just to disappear and letting the whole habit of going to church gradually fade away.

- It is so important for a church to function well that Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ stay together, bound by the love for Christ. There are many things that have the risk of dividing us: the fact that we couldn't meet in person, that we have different opinions, that some think they are better than others or inferior to others, as Paul noticed in the church in Corinth.
- Let us be bound together in the love of Christ. The church is God's gift to us – He doesn't let us struggle on our own. We are there to support one another, to rejoice with each other, to cry with one another.

The church: God's miracle – a great variety of people, yet belonging to Christ. Let us rejoice in being Christ's church!