

We Lack Nothing



I want you to picture a day old baby lying in its little Perspex crib. It's been pronounced healthy by the medics and will shortly be taken home by its parents (they don't hang around in hospital these days!) Now this baby has within it everything it needs to develop into a fully functioning adult and become, who knows, a musician, an engineer, a nurse, a politician? It doesn't require any add-ons or updates or implants. However, it does require care, nourishment and instruction. Sadly we're all too familiar with images of children whose growth has been stunted through starvation and we know that children need to be taught how to behave, with clear boundaries and good role models. And even when all this is in place, toddlers and adolescents can test the patience of even the most competent adult.

Our first reading was from a letter that Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. I think in terms of its development we could describe it as a toddler church! Scholars believe that Paul first preached the Gospel in Corinth in 50 AD staying there for eighteen months, teaching and instructing them before continuing his missionary journeys. They suggest that this letter was written between 53 AD and 55 AD. which makes the church three to five years old . We know it was written in response to reports that things were going badly wrong in the life of the congregation. There were factions and in-fighting, sexual immorality and their worship had become undisciplined and self-indulgent. And yet.... in the opening verses, which we had read to us today, Paul tells them that they have, in Jesus, been given God's grace, they've been enriched in speech and knowledge and they are not lacking in any spiritual gift. Like that new born baby lying in its crib they've been given all they need to grow into mature Christians living up to their calling to be saints but they need some teaching and boundaries.

So in this letter Paul painstakingly tackles the problem areas one by one. As he does so he constantly reminds them of the gospel and of the centrality of Jesus Christ . He reminds them of how Jesus sacrificed himself for them. He reminds them of their baptism and how they've been sanctified and as the Message translation of the Bible puts it, set apart, for 'a God filled life'. They are aligning themselves with different apostles Paul, Peter or Appollos. He reminds them that they belong to Christ alone.

He also teaches them that the many and various gifts they've been given are not to bring glory to any individual but are to be shared for the building up of the church as the body of Christ. And in probably the best known passage of this letter '*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels but have not love I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal*' he teaches them that without Love at the heart of it, their life as Christians is empty and worthless.

If you look at verse two of this letter, it reads 'To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.' And that, my friends, is us. Paul wrote this letter knowing that it would reach a wider audience than the church at Corinth. This was not a document to be read and then cast aside. It would have been read often, copies would have been made and shared with other churches. It would have become part of their Scriptures as it is part of our Scriptures. And it has as much to teach us today as it had to teach the Christians at Corinth nearly two thousand years ago.

It's important we recognise that, like the Christians of Corinth, we too, in our baptism, in our dying and rising to new life in Christ, have been set apart and sanctified to live a God-filled life. And most importantly that we've been given all we need to serve God as Christ's body here in Dunbar.

Sometimes that's hard to believe.

In my various house moves I've become quite well acquainted with the IKEA flat-pack and I take some pride in my achievements in that area. There's something very satisfactory when, having opened up the packaging and laid out all the components on the carpet you look at the checklist and see that everything you need is present and correct. (Things have improved since those early MFI flat-packs when something was always missing.)

Wouldn't it be nice in our life as a church if we could see everything we needed laid out before us when we began a new enterprise. For instance, if the funding had all been in place (perhaps the result of a generous legacy) before we started planning the church refurbishment. But I believe we've learned some very important lessons going through the process the way we have. Looking back we can see that on the face of it we weren't in a position to embark on such an ambitious enterprise because we didn't have the money in the bank, but the experience has taught us that actually we were not lacking in the gifts required to go ahead. And the gifts that people have brought to the project include their experience in fund-raising, finance and law, the gifts of time energy and sheer muscle power and the gifts of money, prayer and love. And the fact that we have had to apply for external funding means that the building when completed cannot be just a nice comfortable 'home' for our congregation. We are committed to use our building to serve the community in which we live. You see God knows what he's doing!

At the same time as this has been happening we've seen two congregations come together as one. Big changes! But not change for change's sake. Change may not be comfortable but growth and change go hand in hand.

Just think of that newborn baby and the changes and pain it undergoes as it grows, from the discomfort of teething to the tumbles it will take as it learns to walk. As part of our growing process here at St Anne's we've learned that we're not divided by denomination but united in Christ and we're learning that it's by sharing our gifts freely and loving one another that our church will grow because these are the qualities which make a church attractive to others.

And when, eventually, we move into our refurbished church it won't be the end of the story it will be the beginning of the next part of our journey with God. We can't expect to see everything laid out in front of us like the components of an IKEA flat-pack. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus encourages a step by step dependence on God 'Give us this day our daily bread'. What we need to do is follow him closely and put our hand in his as we step out into the darkness confident that he has taken care of everything we need for the task ahead of us, that we lack nothing.

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