



RBC CONNECT GROUP STUDY FOR WEEK 26/7/20

RBC: A FLOURISHING/THRIVING CHURCH

Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

This week's reflection/study comes from Rev Chris Barnden, Regional Minister (BUV)

Every Friday night my wife and I turn to Better Homes and Gardens on the TV as one of our regular programs to enjoy. The home renovation section is lost on me, but I'm always interested in Graham Ross' garden spot. I love to see the sheer variety of plants we can plant in our garden, both native and exotic plants, plants with glorious flowers of wonderful colours, and plants with striking foliage and all the varied growing conditions to have each plant flourishing and blooming at their best. What strikes me as most beautiful is when Graham tours a garden showing a whole range of plants and shrubs planted together as one garden.

To me, what makes a garden so beautiful and appealing to the eye is the diversity of shapes and colours growing and cascading together in the garden. Bold dynamic plants mixed in together with small delicate shrubs, with an endless variety of textures, colours and shapes, and all adding to the overall beauty of the garden.

The prophets Isaiah (58:11b) and Jeremiah (31:12b) refer to the restored people of God as like a well-watered garden. I find this picture of a garden an apt metaphor for the church. In the church of Jesus we are people of all manner of preferences and personalities, people of varying characteristics, cultures, histories and vocations. However, in the name of Jesus we have been brought together to be both a community shaped by the gospel, and a witness to the communities around us of the peace and joy of God's kingdom. And this is challenging! Just as every single plant, large or small, robust or delicate, through simply doing what it's been created to do, adds to the beauty of the garden, so every believer, every member of the church, by being what God has re-created us to be, contributes to the richness of life in the Christian community - the church.

Many of our churches have multiple cultures represented in our community, each of whom add to the richness of our life together. When we learn to listen to each other, and through listening, try to better understand each other, we flourish together through increased understanding of God's ways, through encouraging each other's contribution, and through broadening our appreciation of what God is doing among us and within us.

I have had many opportunities to read the Bible together and to pray with sisters and brothers of other cultures. As a typical western Christian I had thought that my way of reading and understanding Scripture was the right way, that my way of understanding how God moves, guides, and acts among us was the right way, and that my view of the church was the right view. But God challenged my unthinking assumptions, and my prejudices, and opened my mind by helping me to accommodate different perspectives, teaching me that other views were not necessarily wrong, just different. My life and my faith have become the richer for learning those lessons.

But we're not thinking exclusively of cultural diversity here. For example, by learning to appreciate diverse views, different personalities, different ways of understanding how God works among us, by listening respectfully to each other, especially listening to those who see things differently to ourselves, our own appreciation of God's gracious ways among us is enlarged, is deepened. By not assuming that my view of life and faith is always right, or even the only legitimate view, is a first step towards flourishing in my own spiritual life.

By understanding that the church is not a western cultural invention, but the marvellous cascade of a myriad of cultures called together to work out life together as a community in the name of Jesus and empowered by his Spirit, we become open to experience the amazing blessings God has for us, and free to blossom and flourish according to God's deep desires for us.

To use a different metaphor for a moment, the Apostle Paul described the church as like a human body, with all manner of organs, bones, sinews, tendons and muscles working together in harmony to create a healthy integrated whole (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). We all know how uncomfortable and painful it is, and how limited we become when one part of our body, even a small, insignificant tendon or muscle is not working as intended. And we know, that's exactly how uncomfortable church can be sometimes, and how we prevent our church from flourishing healthily when we fail to value each other appropriately. Instead, as members of Christ's church we offer ourselves, and welcome each other with all our diverse histories, cultures, our personalities, experiences and our skills to create a healthy, beautiful garden lovingly tended and cared for by the Lord, and growing, blooming, and blossoming to God's delight.

Questions:

- What are some simple things you can do to welcome diversity in your church community?
- In what ways do you think your church life is being inhibited because the diversity of members is not value or encouraged?
- How can we encourage diversity in our leadership?
- How can we encourage the quieter members of our church to make their contribution to the broader life of the church?
- What can you do to provide opportunity to receive the blessing of the quiet voice and not just the loud?
- How might we better respect the cultural diversity in our church family?
- Where your church has multiple cultures represented, in addition to cultural events like 'International Day' how can you promote and celebrate diversity in the life of your church?