

## Sermon

### *Unity and Diversity in the Body*

**Linda Driver**

**Athelstone Uniting Church #53**

**27 January 2019**

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

### **Pray**

Please pray with me:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight,

O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Amen.

Well, as I mentioned earlier, it's good to be back, after a relaxing break. The only negative for me was that on Monday, just as I was preparing to return, I came down with a summer cold – and then lost my voice for a few days! Thankfully, it's back today – and I hope will last for the rest of this service!

While I was on Leave, Paul and I were able to get away to some lovely places:

We visited the Grampians for the first time – gorgeous scenery

We stayed a night at Mount Gambier – and saw Blue Lake at the blue-est I have ever seen – exquisite.

And we visited the Victor Harbor holiday crew and learned how to play Finska – lots of fun!

Some of you will know that on Christmas Day we farewelled Trevor and Ann Phillips – they have since commenced placements as the Pastors of Moonta and Maitland respectively.

During our break, Paul and I helped them settle in to their manse at Moonta and then last weekend, joined them for their commissioning services. On your behalf I brought greetings to the Moonta and Districts churches when I preached at Trevor's commissioning service. Afterwards I was approached by four different people who had a connection with Athelstone years ago! Isn't it amazing what an impact this church has had on people far and wide! Praise God!

### **TDU**

A week ago we had much excitement around Athelstone..

## *Ring bell*

The Tour Down Under bike race came to our part of the world once again!

Did anyone here ride in it?

Participate in it in some way?

Watch it live?

Watch it from the comfort of your home?

It is said to be Australia's Greatest Cycling Race and one of the world's biggest cycling festivals.

When we left Adelaide for Moonta on Friday, the race was just finishing – after the king of the mountain – where they took on Corkscrew Road then raced down onto Maryvale Road – not too far from here – with, I imagine, hundreds, if not, thousands of spectators cheering the riders over the finish line. Is that right?

Back on Tuesday the peloton left from Gorge Road, by Schulze Road, and headed up into the hills on a 200 km plus ride through the hills into the Barossa.

One of Paul Howland's colleagues set up his video camera and recorded the whole convoy as they headed up Gorge road. I was then able to view the video on facebook. Did anyone else see it?

As I watched I was amazed by the amount of other vehicles that were involved before we even saw the cyclists

There were:

police motor bikes

the tour lead vehicle

police cars

service vehicles

more police vehicles

traffic logistics vehicles

the race director

more police motor bikes

the race referee

The Tour down under race director, and safety director

Then the cyclists themselves wooshed past – a blur of colour!

More race officials

The race doctor

Then a car and a bus for each team

Mechanical support

More officials

Media

Ambulances

Medical motorcycles

Fire services

And more police at the rear

while helicopters hovered overhead.

And they were just the ones we could see! There are also all those behind the scenes who aren't seen but are vital to the race!

*Ring bell*

There are much more than bicycles to make a Tour Down Under!

Each are an important component of the race

Each have their own unique role, with their own unique gifts

## **Body**

One could say that the Tour Down Under convoy is like the body metaphor that Paul uses in his letter to the believers in Corinth.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ... the body is not made up of one part but of many. (1 Cor 12:12-14)

## **The gifts (Charismata )**

A healthy body has every part in it performing its own function for the good of the whole. Each is allotted different gifts for differing functions.

Every one of those gifts, a gift of the same Spirit – not for the good of the individual – but for the good of the whole body.

These gifts – charismata – are given according to grace – God's free gift to us. A free gift that springs from the creative grace of God to enable the members of the body to work together to do the work of the body.

Now, in Paul's letter we get a vision of the Corinthian church as a vibrant community where the members of the body received varieties of gifts from the Spirit.

But at the same time, the church did not have a common understanding or agreement about spiritual gifts. Many of them were in rivalry with other members. Some claimed that they were better than others because of their special spiritual gifts.

## **For the common good**

The issue seemed to be that they did not ask what they could do for the common good or what the Spirit wanted them to do.

Paul makes explicit in verse 7, that the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit, is “for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7), meaning that gifts are not to be used for self-promotion or selfish reasons.

All of them are distributed as the Spirit decides for the good of the whole body and the effectiveness of its mission and witness in the world.

Our foundational document, the Uniting Church’s Basis of Union, specifically mentions spiritual gifts:

It says that

“**every member** of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. Our Uniting Church acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ’s Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

## Athelstone

Sue Ellis, our Moderator, has designated 2019 as the Year of Flourishing for the Uniting Church in South Australia. To flourish is to grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly congenial environment.

In this year of flourishing my prayer for us is that together we will continue to discern the unique gifts that the Spirit has given each of us – members of the body of Christ. I pray that we will continue to discern how God is calling us to use those gifts in this next season of ministry here in 2019, so that our congregation and our community will flourish!

I am excited to be here to minister *alongside* you – to encourage and to equip you, as together, as members of the body, we use the gifts the Spirit has given us for the common good / the flourishing of the community.

A few years ago, the Uniting Church in SA used the ampersand with the catchphrase:

Uniting People = you & me & everyone else...

there’s a squiggly mark that can bring us all together..

without the & (ampersand), we are just a bunch of individuals living alongside each other.

Together we are called community. Being in community together.. we accept and welcome everyone. We believe God cares for us & we are to care for each other. We provide a safe place to explore & grow & learn..”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Basis of union para 13

<sup>2</sup> Uniting Church Called to Care resource

Together we at Athelstone Uniting Church are the body of Christ, called to follow Jesus & join in his mission through our church.

Together, to celebrate the rich history of God's activity in this place

Together, to worship and preach the good news

Together, to reach out with love and compassion to each other and to the community around us

Together, to give voice to the vulnerable and oppressed.

Together, to look forward to what God is up to and where God is leading us to next.

## One God

Paul affirms the variety of gifts, services and activities – all of which he attributes back in verses 4 to 6 to the same Spirit, same Lord and same God.

And so we are reminded that the gifts, the ministry, and the empowering of the community for service all belong to God.

God calls us all together as part of the body,  
every one of us with different gifts, different ideas, different tastes.

God calls us all together, to build each other up, to serve each other in love.

God call us together, knowing that we need **all** parts of the body, working together, if we are to be whole.

One body, many parts. United in our diversity through Christ, empowered by the Spirit.

I hope that each of you will be praying about your unique role as part of the body – and that with the love and support and encouragement of others in the body, you will be able to flourish, empowered by the Spirit, to do what only you can uniquely do.

## TDU

I began by speaking about the Tour Down Under, *Ring bell*

and the sight of the convoy with the variety of riders and support vehicles – all with different skills and equipment for their different roles. The peloton was vividly colourful with the many different bikes and the lycra suits covered with sponsors colours.

Paul's letter gives us a picture of a church vividly alive. Things happened. Astonishing things happened. Life was heightened, intensified.

Paul knew that this vivid and powerful activity was the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray for a fresh anointing of the Spirit – for a new season of surprises, refreshment and empowerment of the Spirit.

May the body of Christ here be transformed to overflow with celebration and hope – vividly alive.

Let's pray:

Holy God of life and grace, we give you thanks for making us part of your body.

Help us to be the hands and feet, and the eyes and ears, that bring your good news to all who are in need.

Empowered by your Spirit, may we see a season of flourishing in Jesus' name, Amen.