

Lent (2) Unity; In diversity

To say that unity is a good thing, a biblical or Christian thing, should be uncontroversial enough. Jesus speaks about it and states that “a house divided cannot stand”. The Old Testament calls the tribes of Israel to be united and suggests that if one is struggling the others should not rest without helping them. In the Epistles, Paul repeatedly uses the image of the body to describe our need for Christian unity. Our fellowship is meant to be united.

I have recently been offered an image of unity from David Attenborough’s TV show. In this there is a colony of ants whose home is threatened by flood waters. In the face of imminent danger, they work together gathering the queen and larvae and build a raft with them at the centre. Each of the ant’s locks legs to create a living raft that can float on the flood waters and save the colony.

Nature has many images of unity such as, great herds of zebra, antelope, or wildebeest grazing together. However, very often the images of unity we draw to mind involve uniformity. Yet, our God is the creator God; our God created us in incredible perhaps infinite diversity.

I wonder what it would be like if we could actually achieve this kind of unity. Imagine if everyone at Church could agree what hymns we should sing, or even what style of hymn. Imagine if all vicars wore the same things in every Church on a Sunday morning. Perhaps we could all have a dress code, not wearing exactly the same but similar.

There is another image I’d like to offer you, heaven. I don’t mean the real image of heaven, I haven’t been there to be able to describe it but, the one most people might have by default. We each become angels with white wings and halo’s, we wear white robes and float amongst the clouds all singing the same song of praise together. How does that sound?

Please pause for a while to think about and if possible, discuss.

What would it “really” be like if we had unity through uniformity?

Read Ephesians 4:1-16, or if you remember this from last week, you may wish to focus on verses 11 and 16.

My hope is that we are all beginning to realise that unity in uniformity might not be quite as perfect as it may seem at first glance. The truth is that God has a better way, unity in diversity. In a human or worldly wisdom the best or at least simplest way to achieve unity is through uniformity but God’s way is far greater.

When Paul speaks about the body of Christ, he is describing diversity working together in wonderful harmony. Here he speaks of teacher and prophets, evangelist's and pastors, all are gifts from God and all parts of the body of Christ.

We used to talk a lot about the Church family, and I believe that we still should, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ but, maybe we decided that families were just too complicated to fit our image. My own family, and I mean my wider family not just those who live in the vicarage, have a wonderful ability to fall out over anything. We are simply not all the same and this creates tensions but what is truly wonderful is our ability to fall out and remain together, united and ready to support each other in all circumstances.

One of the main places where Paul talks about the Church as the body is in 1 Corinthians 12, he finishes this passage by saying "and now let me show you the greatest way" the next chapter is of course often recited at weddings "love is the greatest".

In Ephesians 4:16 Paul speaks of the connective tissue that holds all the parts together, the sinews and ligaments. Perhaps if we are to have glorious unity in God's wonderful diversity, we need to concentrate a bit more on these things. Is it love that holds my family together and is that what will hold our fellowship in unity? Is it Jesus as the head of the body? Is it prayer or the Holy Spirit?

I'm sure it is all of these.

What are the things that hold us in unity?

How might we build up these connective things?

Prayer

What do we need to confess?

What do we need to ask for help with?