

***Keeping in touch with God  
and each other.***

## ***UPDATE FEBRUARY 2007***

Dear Friends,

February is about to be upon us and it's time to say 'goodbye'. Keith said in his letter in January that the New Year brings a reality check – I echo his sentiments. Only now as I sit at my desk and ponder what to say, do I realise this is happening, and God has called me to new pastures. My last Sunday will be 11<sup>th</sup> February, but moving house on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> February, so in Dorridge for that week.

I can now share with you that I use the same Scripture Union notes as Keith, so when I read what I did on that Monday back in November on Deuteronomy 31: 1-29, and that 'times of transition seldom pass without challenge, but when two major changes happen simultaneously the effect is more than the sum of the parts', I was stunned, but also relieved that God was so obviously 'on the case' for those leaving, and for those remaining at HTC. ***“Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you”. (Deut 31:6).***

I found those verses of scripture reassuring for us all but, to be honest, I was still at a loss to understand this sudden re-direction for myself. That is why I found the Christmas period exceedingly helpful, allowing the Annunciation story to speak to me personally, as I have already shared in my sermon a few weeks ago. “The unexpected, the sudden, the how can it be, brings fear and confusion, and so the words of the Angel to both Mary and Joseph, ‘do not be afraid’ have been a challenge, but also a comfort to me”. God has allowed me to question, ‘how can that be.....and I have been able to meditate on, and trust in the angel Gabriel’s response, that

nothing is impossible with God, and that whatever He calls you to, He will equip you with the power of the Holy Spirit. But the most important thing is to respond in obedience with the words, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word'.

So I leave, and say 'goodbye' with a sad heart, but trusting in God, and knowing He has gone in front preparing the way for Keith, Rosie, Peter, Anna, David, and also for myself.

It has been a tremendous privilege to serve my curacy at  
Holy

Trinity – such a rich diversity brings its challenges, and its joys! I have learnt many things through good times, and not so good, but I thank God for all the opportunities that I have had as I have ministered in different areas of the Church's life, with specific responsibilities for the Clusters and Small groups, for the Prayer/healing Ministry, & for the 7 o'clock service (shared with Emma Griffiths for some time). I leave excited for their future with Elke Every and Vicki Johnson leading the prayer ministry teams, Pam Hopkins overseeing the Clusters and Small groups, and Michael Hinman co-ordinating the 7 o'clock team. Thank you.

I have been so blessed by the many opportunities to preach and lead at the different services on Sunday, and throughout the week, and my involvement with the Alpha course and the Start course has been moving, inspirational and exciting. My pastoral responsibilities have been a humbling and enriching time, and again a great blessing. Whether it has been listening to a desperate Mum at Dudley Lodge, visiting the dying in hospital, exorcising unwanted spirits from a City centre building society, or just being there at the end of a phone, I want to say 'thank you Lord', and 'thank you' to all who have allowed me in to be part of their lives. I also want to say how much I appreciated HT coming 'on board' with my vision for building accommodation for women training for ordination in Kenya, and two of my highlights will be abseiling down the tower, and having such a hilarious evening the night of the Harambee, as we raised the final amount of money. Those who made both occasions such a wonderful event – thank you!!!!!!

There have been many other wonderful 'highlights' while I have been at HTC, but one I want to mention specifically is New Wine last year. Why? Because I continue to see the workings of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people who went, and Paul's words to Timothy come to mind, 'fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline'. I have seen a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline manifesting more and more in those who received God's blessing from attending New Wine. As I leave, can I encourage all who read this Up-date to think about going this year, and to see Gillian and Steve Gwinnett about signing up, and I too hope to see you there!

As you read this, Saturday is over, and 'thank you's and farewells' have been said, but for those who could not be there, I do want to say 'thank you' for the support, encouragement and love that I have received from so many people at Holy Trinity, and for the good friendships that I have made. I also want to take this opportunity to say 'sorry' to those I may have hurt during my curacy, owing to my weaknesses, or for whatever reason, and ask that you might accept my apologies.

I also want to say in writing what a huge blessing it has been for me to have had the amazing opportunity to train, and work alongside Keith. I never thought I would end up in Coventry, having been sent out by the Diocese of London, but I thank God I did. His teaching, guidance, support, love, encouragement, and 'rebuking in love', has been a bedrock throughout my curacy – I now totally understand why those training for ordination in Birmingham were so upset when they heard he was leaving for Coventry. A treasured training Incumbent had left Birmingham diocese to come to Coventry, and I have been the recipient of his many 'words of wisdom'. But I cannot mention Keith without mentioning Rosie, who has become such a special friend to me, as have Peter, Anna and David. The grieving for me is a 'double whammy', as I leave you at HT, and them, as they depart for Birkenhead.

My prayer for you all as I leave, is the same as I spoke of a few Sunday's ago, that you will be united in your rich diversity, not only of spiritual gifts & talents, but of scripture, tradition, reason and experience, (sorry had to get my Anglicanism in somewhere – love you all!). That you will grow deeper in your personal, & corporate prayer life **(Monthly Prayer Meeting!)**, as you listen to God, setting aside all personal fears and desires, in order to seek and discern His will and way for Holy Trinity, and for the City of Coventry. And that you will be a church rejoicing in its diversity, growing in its maturity, and witnessing to the world its unity in Christ. Remember, nothing is impossible with God, if we are prepared to be His servants obedient to His Word, and obedient to His calling on our lives.

With love in Christ,

Hennie

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**Sermon by Catherine Kendall  
for Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2007.**

1 Corinthians 12 12-31

Without aiming for it, I've managed to give this talk three main points from the passage which happen to begin with the letter A, and three points of application for us now which happen to begin with the letter D. This

sermon is therefore brought to you by the letters A and D.

For the past two weeks we have had two excellent talks on the Holy Spirit: in the first week Penny described how you really had to experience it to know about it; last week Hennie spoke about the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church, then and now. These are not the fruits of the Holy Spirit which are to grow in the life of every Christian – love joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, self-control – but special gifts for the blessing and equipping of the church. And the thing is that *God* gives them.

**v. 10 -11 “To one person he gives the ability to speak in tongues...and to another to explain what is being said... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit and he gives a different gift to each person.”**

Now the focus shifts slightly to the body of the church, to those to whom the gifts are given.

### **1. Absurdity**

**v.21 They eye cannot say to the hand “I don't need you!”**

Paul paints a comical picture for us of the parts of the body arguing with each other over which is the most important. Of course the eye wouldn't say to the hand 'I don't need you' – firstly it couldn't, and secondly it's not the point – we need our body to work together and to get on with the job! Paul is saying to the Corinthian church, this is no more ridiculous than you thinking you don't need each other – with all your gifts, talents, perspectives, judgements. It's ridiculous to imagine you can do without me, or I can do without you.

**2. All different.** It's actually important.

**v.14 The body is not made of only one part but of many parts...**

Consider for a minute what the alternatives might be.

- A church full of single-celled organisms. Might get on – but can't actually *do* very much. OK they're good at dividing – but we're pretty good at multiplying here.
- A church full of people like me. Hmmm. Some things would get done, possibly even well – but other things would be done badly and some would not be done at all.

It's important, for example at a service like the 9 30, that we are all different. I've said this here before but there are a lot of people today making this happen – us here, work going on in the church centre with young people, some of whom you never see because they're out all the time! Then there's catering – coffee, breakfast, administration, vergers. And on a morning like today when a few

key people couldn't make it, there's someone else prepared to step into the breach and cover the work. This is no small feat!

We have different gifts, talents. It's important, like Hennie said last week, that we don't rate some above others. In 1970s and 80s it sometimes seemed in certain evangelical circles that the gift of tongues was to be valued above all others. It more or less defined you as a Christian. That was absurd. Apparently the same was true in the Corinthian church; according to one commentary I read, that's why Paul puts the gifts of tongues in this part of the passage at the end of his list, after the more prosaic, but essential gifts of teaching and administration. He does it twice – in verses 28 and 30. What my daughter called last week the “sexy gifts” – the ones which seem most glamorous, are important, yes, but they are only *some* of the many gifts that we need if we are to be a healthy, balanced community.

In fact, we can argue – like Paul does, that those that we see least of, are the most indispensable! There are plenty of gifted people who can stand up here and do what I'm doing. There are far fewer PA operators or vergers. I'm easily replaceable: they are not. We are all different, and we need to be.

### **3. Appreciation**

**v.26 If one part suffers, all suffer; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.**

We know what this is like – if one bit of you is wrong, you hold yourself differently, your whole body feels out of joint. I remember my mother being on crutches for a while and complaining that her arms and shoulders ached with using her body differently in order to compensate for pain elsewhere. Paul then says the same is true when things go well. We're quite good at rallying round when somebody's having a tough time – we should be able to take genuine pleasure in someone else's success too. Great! You got that job, won that grant, had that baby! It's not always easy because we're human – the comparisons can be very tough - but it's not going to change one situation if another's going well. There's an advert for a mint credit card at the moment, about balance. Someone does something clever in one place, so someone on the opposite side of the world does

something really stupid – and the balance is restored! That is definitely not how God works! We can afford to take pleasure in some else's happiness – for their sake. I think this is something we could do more.

### **Practical application.**

For those of you who are new to the church, or perhaps visiting today, I need to explain briefly the position we're in. We are about to bid farewell to both our curate and our vicar in the next month. They have both got excellent new jobs and we are very pleased for them. However, this does leave us in the unusual state of being without any of the full-time workers to whom we're accustomed. Not only that but we are informed that the time-scale for any replacement will be quite long – the Bishop's letter talked of a year's reflection and consideration before a decision is made, and then if agreed upon, the whole process of making an appointment has to start.

So we are facing up to the reality of at least a year managing ourselves, *and* undergoing a review process of where we are, where we're going, and how this fits in with other factors. To do this, we have services of Justin Welby from the Cathedral, who is a very able man, but we have to do a lot ourselves. Never has there been a stronger call on us to be the body of Christ together. So how are we going to do it? What does this passage have to say to us?

### **1. Differences:**

We have many congregations at HTC – five on a Sunday, four midweek – each with their own identity, style, sense of purpose. The Corinthian church may have had fewer services but the distinctions between their people were far greater –

- Gentile and Jew – race and culture
- Slave and free – I can't think of an equivalent for this – pupil and teacher can be embarrassing; teacher and headmaster, or doctor and patient do happen – but these are voluntary. You can choose to go elsewhere- a slave couldn't choose to leave.

## **What does the passage say?**

**V 13. We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body - whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.**

We hold together because we know what's really important. Whatever our views on baptism we are all baptised into the body of Christ, and whatever our views on gifts of the Spirit, we are all fed by the Holy Spirit who will sustain us through this long interregnum. So what can we do to facilitate this?

We are going to need to make more effort to stay in touch with each other, to keep talking, to pray together at the monthly prayer meeting; I urge you to come along. We need to stay focused on what's important, and defend ourselves against hostility.

It's also going to mean that people's workload is increased because there will have to be more communication and probably more meetings among people in leadership because there's no one person to do it. So pray for and support those in leadership – they're going to be working very hard. I have been in a leadership position during an interregnum – it can be very exposed. I really valued support directly expressed to me.

## **2. Dynamic**

How we are going to relate to each other in the next months is going to matter. It's going to be harder this time because we don't just have to keep this show on the road as we did last time, we have to consider the future, by some process yet to be determined. The best analogy I could think of for this is the family - a working community where decisions have to be taken for the good of the whole. Families are not soft places –there is love and sometimes it has to be tough. I should imagine even in the best family in the world:

- love is unconditional, people are valued and encouraged, they want the best for everyone. And at the same time it is a place of:
- difficult truths, discipline, discussions and negotiations, give and take, sharing of resources; not everyone is pleased all of the time.

## **What does the passage say?**

**V. 25 there should be no division in the body, but the parts should have equal concern for each other. 27 Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.** We need to listen and discuss openly and honestly during this time because we value each other. These discussions may take place in small groups, over coffee, certainly at the PCC. Again, we must show loyalty to those in authority, not to undermine those who are trying to run the process.

### **3. Decide now**

Without wishing to steal next week's sermon topic I have to point forward to Paul's parting comment on gifts, his most excellent way – love; honour, respect.

Now there may be times over the next few months when you need to face an issue with someone – perhaps because you disagree or you need to express some concern to them. The New Testament is full of examples of teaching on this:

- ⌘ Colossians 3 v 9 Do not lie to each other because you have taken off the old self and put on the new.
- ⌘ Ephesians 4 v 15 Speaking the truth in love'

It was difficult for them then and it's not easy for us now: what is your motive? are you saying this because it'll make you feel better, or do you choose to go along with something because it's hard to make a stand against it?

An excellent example of how not to do this on this week's TV . refer of course, to - you know what I'm going to say - *Desperate Housewives!* This week on DH, Bree, the prim one, felt she had to give an unpalatable truth to a friend whose husband had been unfaithful. She took round some cookies to help her break the news. That could catch on. If you need to take issue with me, please bring cookies when you do it – preferably home-baked:

- firstly , it signals that you've got something difficult to say
- secondly it will provide comfort eating for me when you've gone.

The lady took it well and promptly responded in kind with some revelation about Bree's daughter. But what was Bree's motive? To

clear her conscience; she hadn't really considered whether the other person would want to know.

And then I have to mention *Big Brother*. Actually I couldn't watch it, but I have teenage children who did watch it this week and therefore I can tell you about it!

- Row about the stock cubes – it was awful – it reminded you of the times when you've been around someone being bitchy, and you've gone along with it.
- After Jade's eviction, she was shocked at the outcry that her words have provoked – questions at Prime Minister's Questions Time, protests in India. She hadn't really meant it – idle cruelty – no thought of what her words might signify or the damage they might cause.

Not saying for a minute we are all thoughtless, or that we are being watched, but how we relate to each other is going to matter. At the last prayer meeting one prayer which really struck me reminded us that we are not the only church going through this reassessment, it's not a unique position. And yet how we behave will affect how we are seen in the diocese. You know preachers preach to themselves – I'm thinking I need to keep a watch on my tongue – to be truthful – yes, but not destructive, and not tear down those who are trying to build up. For what it's worth, I think it helps to focus on the person, rather than the issue.

**What does the passage say? v.13 And now I will show you the most excellent way.**

Finally then...

If you use the Daily Guidelines Bible notes you'll have been reading through the gospel of John this week, and Jesus' last words to his disciples.

**A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, as I have loved you.** Their Lord and Master is about to depart from them, and this is one of the last things he'll say to them. Now I'm not suggesting Keith is Jesus, but this is the sort of thing people say as their last word – parting gift. My mother said something like this to my sister and me in one of the last conversations we had – look after each other.

If we are to reflect the love that has been poured out for us by Jesus, then we will cope with this time, and despite its challenges, it could be a tremendously powerful time for the church as a whole - to draw us closer to each other and to God. We need to reflect on these words in this passage and make them our own.

⌘ We're all different – how will we hold together?

**v. 13. We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body - whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.**

⌘ How are we going to relate to each other over the months ahead?

**v. 25 there should be no division in the body, but the parts should have equal concern for each other. 27 Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.**

⌘ What do we do now?

**v. 31 And now I will show you the most excellent way – love.**

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**Sermon by Elke Every  
for Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2007.**

1 Corinthians 12: 12-31

I would like to start with a prayer from the Eastern Orthodox Church:

Blessed are you, O Christ our God,  
You revealed your wisdom to simple fisherman.  
Sending down your Holy Spirit  
And thus catching the universe in a net.  
Once when God descended,  
He confused human speech and scattered the nations:  
But with tongues of fire, he calls us back to unity.  
For this we honour the ever holy Spirit.  
Amen

Within a few short days and weeks, Keith and Hennie will no longer be here to lead us and guide us. I feel as though God is using this time, and our study of the first letter to the Corinthians, to focus our minds on some important scriptural truths. Maybe we are learning these truths for the first time, or maybe we are being challenged to look at them again, but, most importantly, we need to ask ourselves how this teaching applies to us as individuals, and to the church as a whole.

Last week, Hennie shared her passionate belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit should be eagerly sought after and used to build up the body of Christ; how prayerful use of these gifts leads to wholeness in each of us individually, and also to an increase in numbers for the Church.

Next week Keith will talk to us about the requirement to love one another in everything we do, and I'm sure you all agree that there couldn't be anyone better equipped to deliver that message.

But between the need to build up the church and the necessity to love one another, comes the message that we are to live in unity. So today I want to concentrate on Paul's message of "*Unity in diversity*", and to suggest that the only way to a truly, unified body of Christ, is through valuing its diversity.

According to Paul, the only way to live in unity is to lovingly accept diversity. We cannot actually operate as a body unless we are all different, and performing the different functions God has allocated to us.

The Christian Church is incredibly diverse: often that is its strength, and far too often our diversity has led to division.

But I want to talk about the hope I feel, for the future of the world-wide Christian Church, the Anglican Communion, and particularly the hope I feel for our future here at Holy Trinity. Not some woolly optimism based on wishful thinking, but a faith in God; that he has his hand on us and is weaving his will through us.

No matter how we try to thwart his plans, there are so many instances, locally and globally, of God's grace shining through.

In the January 'Update', Keith talks about "constructive dissent", as opposed to "destructive consent". "Constructive dissent" is the idea that, whenever the Church faces a new challenge, we need to express our questions, our fears and our convictions, openly and honestly with one-another; we need to have confidence, that we will be listened to with patience and love. And we need to spend more time listening than talking, as we prayerfully try to understand where our brothers and sisters in Christ are coming from. And through it all, each one of us needs to actively seek God's will, for ourselves and for the Church.

A sad, and rather large, part of the Christian Church's history, is one of "destructive consent", and at its worst "destructive dissent". Too often, when someone has threatened the established order, interpreted scripture in a different light, or simply wanted to worship in a new way, the result has been schism.

But there never has been one single Christian who has had all the answers. We could do with a little of Paul's humility when he confesses, in 1 Cor. 13: verse 12:

"Now we see a poor reflection; then [in death] we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

This humble insight comes from a man who had a profound relationship with Jesus and an incredible ministry. We need to hold the truth of what he is saying close to us, because when we don't, when we start to believe that we have all the answers, we start to sit in judgement on the faith of our brothers and sisters.

It's a very natural human response to seek out those who share our beliefs and theology; whose expression of spirituality, we recognise as being the same as our own. There is deep comfort when we realise that somebody else meets with God in the same place that we find him. Conversely, we can feel unsettled and threatened when

somebody meets with God in a place we don't understand. But we only have to look at his creation to be confident that God loves diversity, and being different can be a blessing.

I think there is something really significant about what Pope Benedict XVI is doing at this time. There is a strong element of controversy about him, and a lot of what he stands for may make us Anglicans feel uncomfortable; but he is reaching out the hand of fellowship to other denominations, in a way that has not been done before, and he is meeting with an encouraging response.

For the first time in a thousand years, leaders of the Orthodox Churches met with the leader of the Catholic Church; dialogue with the Anglican Church continues and he is approaching the Chinese government with great diplomacy in his efforts to re-establish links with the Chinese Catholic Church.

Pope Benedict has been reared and served in a Church that teaches that Catholicism is the only sure and certain path to God and that the Pope is the gate-keeper. If he can struggle through the confines of that doctrine and strive after unity for the sake of Jesus, then I think we can all take encouragement.

We have so much to learn from the spiritual traditions of others.

Nearer to home, the only image of the Anglican Church, which we ever seem to see reflected back at us, through the media, is of an 'organisation' on the brink of collapse, hopelessly riven by conflict and destined, shortly, to pull itself apart. I know there are many serious and painful issues that the Church is contending with, but there is something else going on that we don't see in the media.

One example of this is the dialogue which is being mediated, quietly and prayerfully behind the scenes, between African bishops, who believe that it is against scripture for homosexuals to serve in the Church and those bishops in the West, who believe that homosexual priests should be welcomed into ministry, in all its fullness.

I don't think that either side is going to have a blinding revelation that the other side has been right all along, but what is happening, is that people are coming to understand the pain that their brothers and sisters are going through. There is a growing acceptance that, although people are approaching this issue from different sides, they all love God and want to serve him faithfully.

We need to take a balanced view of what the Church is facing; to find the line between complacency and despair, and to keep praying for the work of reconciliation and unity.

And finally to us here, at Holy Trinity.

We *really* excel at *diversity*. We are so richly blessed in diverse talents and gifts; and we have many outlets for those talents; in teaching, evangelism, music or prayer ministry; nurturing the youth of the church and seeking to extend God's love to the City. Each element enriches the church and makes it a place where many find a home.

However, we have to acknowledge that, at times, we have really struggled with unity.

After having been settled at Holy Trinity for a number of years, Peter and I felt that God was calling us to move on and, with our children Niall and Kate, we left here to join Queens Road Baptist Church. It was a very enriching time and we learnt a lot, but we were really glad when, almost four years ago, we felt that God was calling us back here. We had such a warm welcome and it was wonderful to be reunited with this lovely family.

But something had started to change while we were away: we walked back into a church where there was a palpable atmosphere of love; a new movement of the Holy Spirit, revealing himself in openness and fellowship. Even through some difficult and challenging times, I feel that the love and fellowship has continued to grow and I'm so grateful to have been here at this time.

We have been right, I believe, to attribute this growth to the leadership of Keith and Hennie under God. But, in part, they have been able to achieve what they have achieved because, amongst the fellowship, there has been such a yearning for healing and a desire to grow into unity. The appreciation of what they have taught us, and the knowledge that we can only thrive as a church, if we *continue* to seek after God's grace, is what will carry us through the coming months.

We have suffered a double bereavement in losing both Keith and Hennie. We knew we couldn't keep them forever, but they are leaving us much sooner than we had hoped. The news that Hennie was leaving had left many of us feeling deep pain; to hear that Keith was going too was like being punched, very hard, in the same place.

I think it would be fair to say that most people experienced real anxiety about the future; past hurts, that have not been dealt with yet, have come to the surface and there is a genuine fear that we might lose our way.

But, quite unexpectedly, over the last couple of weeks, I've started to hear expressions of hope, from people of all different congregations. We are still acutely aware of what we are losing (the full impact will not hit us until after we have said goodbye), but there seems to be a growing willingness to rise to the challenge: to trust in God and to know that he is still with us.

It is up to us now, to continue building on the growth in unity we have achieved, in partnership with Keith and Hennie, and through God's grace.

To those who are fearful and hurting I would like to say; come forward and receive prayer. There are many people, just waiting with open arms, willing to pray into your pain and walk with you as you grow through healing into wholeness.

To those who are blessed with optimism I would like to say; let us be tender and patient with those who are not there yet.

For all of us, I pray for a spirit of humility and a willingness to learn from one another.

Each one of us is seeking to serve Jesus, to the best of our ability, with the talents and gifts *God* has given us. It is our responsibility to have “equal concern for each other”. Let us demonstrate, through our actions, that “though we are many, we are one body”, because that is what Jesus has called us to be.

I would like to end with some words from the prayer Jesus says, for all believers in John gospel:

“<sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:22-23)

Amen