

KCF 6: LIVING STONES.

Before we begin, would you please read a well-known passage, just to remind yourself of Paul's teaching: **Ephesians 4 v 11-16.**

This past year and a half has been difficult for us all. Christians differ in their beliefs about what God might be saying to the world through the pandemic, but there is almost universal acceptance that He has been speaking to the church, and has been calling us back to consider what we really are.

As an aside, let me start with a quick warning of two dangers that have emerged during this time: the first is that our Government has discovered how easily it can close down our churches! Now that might not seem too serious at present, but there is now a precedent should a future government actively hostile to the Christian faith ever come to power. The second is that while "Virtual church" may have been a wonderful temporary provision to keep faith alive for those who have not yet learned to feed themselves, the danger we now face is that Christians have discovered they can have a Sunday morning lie-in, stay in bed in their jammies and watch a recorded "service", and feel they've done their religious duty for the week.

All the images in the NT used to depict the church are of something that is living: a body, a family, a bride, one new man, a field, a vineyard, an army, a city – even the metaphor of a temple is a *living* one, made up of living stones. These remind us that we are called to be part of a living organism, and not an institutional organisation. As the "household of God" (a phrase used in 1Tim 3 v 15) we are to be centred around Him, house Him, and display Him to the world. It is clear that as soon as someone was converted in the early church, they naturally associated themselves with meeting other followers of Jesus (Acts 2 v 42).

What may surprise you is to discover the main point of meeting together. It was not specifically to worship, as we so often assume. It was clearly to build one another up:

- When you assemble, each one has ... *But everything that is done must be useful to all and build them up in the Lord* [NLT] – 1Cor.14 v 26.
- And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together ... but let us encourage one another... [NIV] – Heb. 10 v 24-5.
- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing... [Col. 3 v 16].

The whole emphasis of the church in the NT was to build each other up. Do you realise there are almost 60 "each other" references in the NT? But the reason for this is that the Body may be brought to maturity (or "one new man") to reveal the Lord Jesus. Many translations miss something of the strength of this in Eph.4 v 13 where the Greek uses the phrase "full-grown man", and not "maturity".

When I am preaching, I do not like to read long quotations because they can be difficult to follow, but the advantage of sending you something in writing is that you can read (and re-read!) it at your leisure, and take time to ponder over it. A few months ago, a friend sent me a copy of Frank Viola's book "Reimagining Church" [pub'd David C Cook, Colorado Springs, 2008]. Here's a passage for you to think through:

"The highest purpose of the church meeting, then, is to make the invisible Christ visible through His body. Put another way, *we gather together to reassemble the Lord Jesus on the earth*. When this happens, not only is Christ glorified in His saints, and not only is each member edified, but something is also registered in unseen realms ... Paul tells us that the manifold wisdom of God is made known through the church to the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places."

The purpose of my body is to express the life that is inside it. You really don't know anything about me unless you have seen me ... and it is important that you see all of me. If parts are missing, then I don't function properly. That's how important it is that you meet together and are regular in attendance. I realise that this may be a difficult, or frustrating, word for you at this present time, but a body that does not come together is NOT a body.

Have another look at Eph.2 v 22 : "In Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit," and " you also, like living stones , are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices" [2 Pet.2 v 5.], and in verse 10 Peter goes on to refer to them as the "people of God". Our highest calling is to host the presence of God, but we can only do that by being built together ... and that must mean meeting together.

Except for the genuinely housebound, Christians in hiding because of persecution, and the tiny minority living in extremely remote situations, virtual church has to come to an end in order that we can become what our glorious God has called us to be.

May God bless you all as together you seek the way forward for KCF in Glenrothes.