

## Sermon 2 March 2025 The foundation of our church is people.

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-22 Luke 6:43-49

The first illustration in our Gospel reading concerns trees and fruit. *'No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit.'* Luke 6:43. Only good trees will produce fruit, which simply means that what we do or say will be determined by the sort of people we are. In the end, our church is about people, and if our church is to truly be the body of Christ, then how we treat people, whether they be in our immediate community or beyond, will determine that. Buildings are fine, in fact they are important because you do need to have the appropriate facilities, but if the focus is on buildings to the detriment of people, then our church will be failing its duty and its purpose.

I want to make two points here. Firstly, I have referred to our church being the body of Christ. In our first reading, Paul makes the point that a body is made up of many parts, and all parts have an important part to play; they are integral to the functioning of the body. *'As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are the most necessary.'* Wow, that is encouraging! I take great heart from that! Every one of us has a part to play in the functioning of our church, and therefore the functioning of God's kingdom.

I want to share something with you. Every year we are required to file a statistical return for the diocese. One of the stats they call for is the number of volunteers and hours contributed throughout the previous year. Rev Ann has the task of compiling these figures. Last year at St Paul's in the Park we had a total of 70 volunteers contributing 3,305 hours! That is absolutely tremendous! That is such a credit to you all and a wonderful statement about the presence of God's kingdom here at St Paul's. That is very simply what God's kingdom is all about. It is not rocket science nor is it grand acts of service as effected by Mother Teresa or Francis of Assisi. Martin Luther King said, *'Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.'*

The other point I want to briefly make here is that in the same way as we should make sure our focus should be on people and not buildings, so also do we need to do our best to ensure that our priorities lie with people, and not rules and procedures. There is a story about Queen Victoria who was hosting a diplomatic reception in London. The guest of honour was an African chieftain. All went well during the meal until, at the end, finger bowls were served. The guest of honour had never seen a British finger bowl, and no one had thought to brief him beforehand about its purpose. So he took the finger bowl in his two hands, lifted it to his mouth and drank.

For an instant, there was breathless silence among the British upper crust. Then Queen Victoria took her finger bowl in her two hands, lifted it and drank. The next moment, 300 British ladies and gentlemen did the same! Queen Victoria had put the interest and well-being of her guest before rules and convention.

Recently, I read an article entitled, 'How Generation Z is transforming the church for the future.' Generation Z, also known as Zoomers, are essentially those aged between 15 and 30. According to the article, Generation Z individuals express a profound desire for authenticity and meaningful connections. They are drawn to communities that prioritise genuine relationships over ritualistic practices. We need to be mindful of that as we move forward.

Bishop Ross, in his sermon here in this hall earlier last year, said, *'In our endeavours to allow for the dynamism of the Spirit to guide our life and to affect people by the love and grace of God, we want to be free of the bureaucracy and rules and policies that seem to get in our way.'* Food for thought.

I want to now refer to the second illustration from our Gospel, the illustration of the person who builds his house on rock in contrast to the person who builds his house with no foundation. So how does this relate to our church? Jesus tells us that it is like someone who listens to his teaching and obeys him. *'I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words and obeys me.'* Luke 6:47. One of the meanings of *obey* is to 'behave in accordance with.' The person who behaves in accordance with the teaching, the values, the life of Jesus builds his house on rock. To do this with conviction calls for faith. Without faith, we don't have anything. The only way we can reflect something of Christ in our lives is to believe in him, believe in everything he stands for.

I go back to the point I made earlier. The foundation of our church is people, people who have faith, who do their best to obey the teaching, example and commandments of Jesus. The point is this, the Christian ethic is about working alongside people, not in isolation.

*Demonstration – dropping \$5 note*

American politician, Chuck Page, said, *'A single leaf working alone provides no shade.'*

Communicate, encourage, affirm, respect, care – that's the Christian way of doing things, that builds relationships, and that is what builds our church. And most importantly, this must include, embrace everyone. Jesus makes no qualifications when he tells us to 'love our neighbour.'

I go back to that report on Generation Z, and I quote, *'Generation Z have a commitment to diversity and inclusion. They advocate for spaces that welcome all individuals, regardless of background or identity.'* That certainly rings bells for me. Soon you will receive a presentation on the vision and branding of our new church and community centre. We are suggesting a slogan, 'Open to all.'

Let me quote further from the Generation Z report. *'By fostering authenticity and inclusivity, faith communities can create environments where individuals feel valued and engaged.'* It is our hope that the community centre will play a major role in assisting our church to provide that very environment.

I want to finish by reiterating the point made earlier. Our church is Christ's body, and we are all, every single one of us, part of that body, and as such, we all have a role to play. It might not be a high-profile role, but it is a vital role that contributes to the functioning of our church, and therefore, the body of Christ.

I quote from Ephesians 1:22-23 where Paul says, *'And God has put all things under the authority of Christ, and he gave him this authority for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is filled by Christ who fills everything and everyone with his presence.'*