

How does your garden grow? 1 Corinthians 3.1-9



Loveday has already pointed out how reading portions of Paul's New Testament letters can be like listening to one side of a phone conversation, we are left to fill in the blanks of what the other persons are responding, feeling. Today's passage is such an example. Paul writes:

"And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?... I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants, nor the

one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” (1 Cor: 3.1-4, 6-7)

An unholy row still rumbles on just below the surface between the church members at Corinth, in fact it seems that little or no progress has been made at unifying these people since the opening verses of this Epistle. Perhaps we can be forgiven for asking why there should be only one church congregation in Corinth? Wouldn't several churches be better, more able to spread the Gospel? And especially if they can't agree with each other why shouldn't Paul and Apollos have their own churches for the sake of peace? After all, having two churches can appeal to different kinds of people which is surely a good thing, is it not?

Paul wants to nip this notion in the bud, reminding the Corinthians that a mature spiritual person seeks unity not division, that their disunity reveals their utter brokenness. Paul leaves no wiggle room about this current situation. They were not to just tolerate each other as they tip-toed around each other idiosyncrasies; God wants them to be truly united.

1 Corinthians isn't exactly one of Paul's friendliest letters and in this section, we hear in his words the frustration that he is feeling. The Corinthians were used to seeing themselves in the very best light, so why would it be different for their spiritual life? These are cosmopolitan people who would have fitted in rather well in today's world. They would have certainly engaged in all manner of social media platforms that allowed them to shine. For them, image is everything, until Paul, in just a sentence, demotes their status from 'brothers and sisters' to squabbling infants. Can you imagine the emotions that would have aroused among this well-heeled, well connected congregation?

Their continuing preoccupation with status and shows of jealousy are proof that there is more work to be done. And the work is not about feeding the ego but about being fed by the God who nurtures us into our spiritual life and strengthens our unity.

“For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building”.1 Cor. 3. 9)

Despite all we may do, or not do, for ourselves, it is God alone who will give the growth, He calls us into a relationship where we are both the field and the fieldworker, the gardener and the harvest, the labourer and God’s temple.

Every blessing Linda