

Sunday, 16th January 2022

Psalm 36, 5 – 10

1 Corinthians 12, 1 – 10

Do you like crossword puzzles? Well, I do enjoy them but not the ones with cryptic clues. Recently I came across a puzzle that made the connection: God – love, using one as a synonym of the other.

What could be more apt than that. God is love. Love is the defining characteristic of God. It is God's main quality and on the idea of love all other attributes are based. God's love is without limits. Psalm 36 makes this totally clear.

"Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens", expresses the idea that there is no limit to the love of God. It is so valuable that we cannot fix a price for it, it never fails. Psalm 36 praises God for His love and how it is shared across the world. Love is more than just an emotion, it is self-giving, self-sacrificing. It found its ultimate expression in Jesus.

God is not distant but cares, He is close and offers protection. ***"Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings."*** It is a great metaphor of how all, no matter who they are, can run to God's shelter. The picture here evokes ideas of a personal, caring relationship. We think of small chicks being protected by the mother hen. This personal side of God was brought to its fulfilment in Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit God establishes the link between believers and Jesus and his loving care.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul describes how the Holy Spirit works in the life of the individual and also in the church. The Holy Spirit is another way how God shows his love and care for people. Paul reminds his readers that before they turned to Christ they were following 'idols', things that are without substance and value. They might resemble something that appears worthy but ultimately, they are 'mute' and not able to respond. In contrast, those who put their trust in Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul gives a simple test to see who has received the Holy Spirit, and is the ability to confess their faith. If you have faith and express it by proclaiming "Jesus is Lord" meaning "Jesus is my Lord", then you have received the Holy Spirit. The confession of faith and receipt of God's spirit happen at the same time. Therefore, anyone who believes has the Holy Spirit. Turning this round, those who reject Jesus, who make a reverse declaration, denying the Lordship of Jesus do not have the Holy Spirit.

In the following verses, 4 – 11 Paul explains how the Holy Spirit works in the individual and the congregation. The various ways in which the spirit is active all show the love of God. There are many different ways this happens, but each has one aim: to build up and encourage the believers and benefit the community.

"Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." This quote from 1 John 4, 11 makes this clear: God loves each individual and bestows his gifts of grace (charisma) on the believer who then responds by caring and loving others.

Paul refers to these gifts as "charisma", thus pointing out that they are given as an act of grace. You can't work for them, you can't demand them. The individual Christian is the passive recipient. We can't choose which gift is given, but we can be sure that whatever it is, it is then meant to encourage others. The Holy Spirit does not fill a believer so that she or he is singled out or in some way

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privileged but it is always a gift with an effect on the rest of the community. ***“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”***

God is love, God loves each and every person. This love is expressed and experienced through the Holy Spirit which is active in the Christian community. The various gifts are all expressions of this immeasurable divine love which is freely given, not because we are worthy but because God cares so much. We can rejoice in this and praise God for his wonderful provision.