

“Metanoeo: change your mind!” 1 Cor 12:1-12

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today I would like to reflect on something very difficult, and because it is so difficult we keep failing, and we need to return to this matter again and again. What is it?

Do you remember how John the Baptist began his ministry? Do you remember how Jesus began His ministry? Do you remember how the apostles began their ministry, what was their message? Repent and believe in the Gospel!

Repentance! We recently already reflected on it, but it is actually a challenging concept to translate and to understand. The Gospel accounts were written in Ancient Greek. And the word that we translate as ‘Repent’ is ‘Metanoeo’.

What does it mean? Why is it so tricky to translate? Because it has a rich meaning, including, ‘to alter one’s mind, to choose a different perspective, to change one’s way of life as the result of a change of thought and attitude’. All of that. Metanoeo!

I can still remember, it probably took place when I was in third or fourth year in a Seminary in Latvia, when one day I was really struck reflecting on the meaning of the 1st Commandment and its explanation in the Small Catechism that I should fear, love and trust in God above all things.

You know how it works, sometimes we hear the same message again and again, there is seemingly nothing new. But then, suddenly, the penny drops, the message sinks in and we are surprised and overjoyed by what the Spirit of God has graciously revealed to us. That happened to me as well.

Suddenly I had this clarity that what the 1st Commandment expects is a complete change of one’s mind, thoughts, perspectives, attitudes, priorities, allegiances, one’s very way of life in all its expressions, in all relationships and activities.

Complete and all-embracing remaking and renewal of every aspect of one’s entire life. At that moment it dawned on me how extensive a work it is. No less than a

lifelong journey. That is another way to describe what 'repent and believe in the Gospel' means. We can see how much is involved, how much is required.

Now we need to ask some pointy questions: "How are we going with it? How am I going? How are you going with this change of mind and life? How are we as a congregation going with it?" The truth is, that we struggle.

All of us, as individuals, as a congregation, as a synod. We live in this world and the old order of things, the worldly way of doing things continually shapes how we think and how we lead our lives. It really is a day-to-day and a life-long struggle to renew our minds, to cleanse this worldly thinking from our lives, to emerge and arise for new life with Christ.

I want to invite you to reflect on one such aspect of our lives where such metanoia, such renewal of our minds and actions is needed. Every year the Lutheran Church of Australia gathers statistical reports from its congregations.

It is kind of interesting and a bit satisfying to look back on what has happened during the year, what we have done. One can easily see that there may be different benefits in doing it. But... What information do we gather?

How do we try to appraise our ministry? What measurements do we use? Or, perhaps, we should ask better questions - what information should we gather, what should we try to assess and evaluate?

Right now, it is mostly about 'how many'. How many members, how many in attendance, how many joined, how many left, etc. Sure, on the one hand, that is understandable. That is the information that we can relatively easily supply.

The problem with this kind of appraisal is that we tend to evaluate our ministry mostly looking inward and it can easily become a numbers game. Focused on ourselves. Have our numbers gotten bigger or smaller? Have we grown or shrunk? Have we made any progress?

Those tend to become ways we think about our ministry. Interestingly, for the last three years our combined attendance at Underdale and Glandore has been almost identical. It has changed by less than 1%. What does it mean? Has our shared ministry been good or bad? What do these numbers tell us? I am not sure...

How should we think about our ministry? Which way would be more Biblical? How can we Metanoio, how can we change our minds? There are a few good lessons in what the Holy Spirit has written to us through the apostle Paul.

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. [...] There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [...] All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

Let's briefly consider three such lessons. What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? What is the nature of the Church, of Christian community? In what power do we serve? Purpose of the gifts. Nature of the Church. Power to serve.

What is the purpose of spiritual gifts? You all have received spiritual gifts. Many of them. To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit. He apportions those spiritual gifts as He wills. No one is left without them. No one!

Unfortunately, when we are gifted, how does our old selfish self perceive those gifts? Too often we take them as signs of our worth and significance. The more gifted we are, the better we consider ourselves to be. I am so special!

That was also a problem for Corinthians. They were puffed up, boasting and elevating themselves above others. Thus, the Spirit needed to clarify that He gives us all the gifts with a certain purpose. What is it? For the common good.

In other words, all the gifts that God gives us, He gives us with the purpose of service. So that we can use them to serve others. This is true for us as individuals and also for us as a congregation.

So, how should we appraise our ministry? What does the Spirit teach us? We should be asking these questions - what gifts has the Triune God given to me, what gifts or set of gifts has our Lord given to our congregation?

How can I use those gifts for the common good, in service to others? How can we as a congregation use the gifts the Lord has entrusted to us most faithfully and most fruitfully? It is about looking outwardly, towards others, towards the world.

How can I bless as many as possible? How can we as a congregation bless as many as possible carrying out the Great Commission that Jesus has given to us, namely - go and make disciples from all nations!

That is the purpose of all the gifts, spiritual and also material that the good Lord has entrusted to us. To you. This is how we should evaluate our ministry. How well have I used my gifts? How well have we as a congregation used our gifts? How fruitfully have we traded our talents, or, perhaps, have we hidden them?

May the Lord bless us and guide us and make us passionate for His service, so that we can look at our ministry and rejoice, not in numbers, but in how generously we have poured our hearts out for the common good and for God's mission!

Second lesson. **What is the nature of the Church, of Christian community?** Again, we need to renew our minds. Especially in the West, we are so individualistic. Yes, we are. I most certainly am, and I am discovering it again and again, how deeply this is engraved in me. We struggle to embrace Biblical vision for the Church.

We can effortlessly make everything about ourselves. What I want. What I prefer. What is good for me. Instead of asking - what is good for this community. But also, when we think about good things, we struggle to believe that we are one body.

Paul wrote that there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; varieties of service and varieties of activities, but the same Lord. What does this mean? On the one

hand, it means that we should always look for ways to use our gifts for the common good, for God's mission.

On the other hand, we should also rejoice when the gracious Lord uses the gifts of His body, even if those are not our gifts. Whatever we do as a body, we participate in it as members. It is our communal service where we serve as the body of Christ.

For example, if one of our members is blessed with opportunities to bring the Gospel to children in public schools, like our sister Jackie, we should consider it our ministry, we should pray for it, support it, promote it, rejoice and be grateful.

If our members are blessed with opportunities to serve abroad, like Lockwood's family, we should pray for them, support and rejoice. As one body. If our members are blessed to serve in hospitals and aged care facilities, as Pastor Jack and Lois are, we should pray for them, be grateful and rejoice.

If our members are blessed to serve with the Gospel in other communities, or to be involved with ministry projects that can bless many, like pastor Guntars and Jana, we should consider them our ministry, we should pray, rejoice and support them.

For we are one body. If one member is blessed to serve, all members are blessed to serve. We are not separate, disconnected members, we are one body of Christ. May the Lord help us to pray, rejoice, be grateful and support one another as we should!

Finally, in what power do we serve? It is quite simple. This is how Paul puts it. No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of service, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

Every time we gather together to receive His gifts, we confess that Jesus is our Lord. You do. The truth is, on our own we are incapable of making such a confession. It is only because you have received the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit dwells in you and unites you with the Triune God that you can know, trust and confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord.

On our own we are weak, we are selfish and fearful, we all are, there is no passion to serve, neither joy to sacrifice for the sake of others. On our own we are lukewarm and indifferent. But when the Spirit of truth and peace and joy and passion and wisdom and service and love begin to burn in our hearts, we are changed.

Our minds are changed, our attitudes are changed, our allegiances and priorities are changed, our lives are changed and we are transformed to live as God's people, beautiful in our ministry, loving in our community, attractive in our service, gracious in our relationships. Our Lord Himself with His presence empowers us all.

Sure, we will keep struggling with our worldly thinking, it is a massive work to be renewed and restored, but God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ are not afraid of hard work and sacrifice. They will not stop until they finish their work with you.

Metanoeo, to change our mind and life, that is so difficult, it is impossible for us. But as you know, with our Lord Jesus Christ all things are possible. He will not leave you. He will keep empowering you until you are remade into that magnificent creature who will be like Him, and who will live and reign with Him forever. **Amen.**