

## A story about a mouse, a piano & a musician 19-Jan-25

I have a story to share with you today about a mouse, a piano and a musician! This conversation took place on a plane quite a few years ago.

Robert Fulghum was sharing a flight with an Australian carpenter and they struck up a conversation about theology. The carpenter declared that his theology had a lot to do with fleas and a dog. How so, you may be wondering? Arguing whether God exists, he said, is like fleas arguing whether or not the dog exists.

That reminded Robert of an old story that he thought first appeared in a British newspaper, about a family of mice who lived inside a large piano. All the dark spaces of their world were filled with sound and harmony. At first the mice were impressed by it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that there was Someone who made the music --though invisible to them, yet close to them. They loved to think of the Great Player whom they could not see.

Then one day a daring mouse climbed up part of the piano and returned very thoughtful. He had discovered how music was made. Wires were the secret; tightly stretched wires of graduated lengths which trembled and vibrated. They must revise all their old beliefs: None but the most conservative could any longer believe in the Unseen Player.

Later another explorer carried on the explanation further. Hammers were now the secret, numbers of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory, but it went to show that they lived in a purely mechanical and mathematical world. The Unseen Player came to be thought of as a myth.

But the pianist continued to play.

Why have I shared this story with you – because we are often heard to say and feel that the spiritual gifts which have been given by Someone we can't see, to someone else is great, but somehow, I've missed out because I don't have any. Perhaps, when exploring out of our comfort zone, like the mice did, we will find the Spiritual gift/s that Paul is addressing to the people of Corinth. When we take a look at everything that happens here, by different individuals, we will soon see the many, many, gifts that make St Ninian's such a unique place. Our uniqueness is real and when we search for the heart of St Nin's we see the diversity and unity within the body of Christ. Through the lens of Paul's writing, we can explore how our encounters with God manifest tangibly for the common good for us, and our interactions with the local community, and if last week's worship can be used as an example, the Inner North Congregations. Paul isn't saying to us to sit still in our comfort because there's no more work to be done, Paul's words call us to continue to be active, and to use our Spiritual gifts in our community here and wherever God's people are to transform neighborhoods into places of grace and resilience.

Paul's description of the various gifts, such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing and miraculous acts, clearly remind us that when God asks something of us, God also equips us with the uniqueness to be able to do it – much as God did with John the Baptist as we heard last week. These gifts aren't just personal treasures to be closeted away, they are divine resources with the intention for them to be used for the enrichment of community. In a practical sense, when individuals within a faith community recognise their gifts and share them generously, they become part of a beautiful tapestry which is fearfully, carefully and wonderfully woven together. It's in this space where an environment of support, compassion and people are empowered to use their gifts and skills to be a united body of Christ -- not separate from the Creator, but in the Creator's presence.

To envision our encounter with God having evident implications for the common good, we can consider a few areas where spiritual gifts can lead to communal transformation. For instance, those who are gifted with wisdom are enabled to provide thoughtful ways forward for those who are struggling with parts of their life. Offering insights that lead to more useful and productive decision-making. This can nurture an environment of growth and resilience, where people can feel supported not only spiritually but also practically. It echoes our thoughts of the moments when we encounter God deeply, we're led and guided into God's love and wisdom which we then pour out into the lives of our faith community and neighbourhoods wherever they may be.

We don't often consider the gift of healing in a meaningful way. However, it is a gift which is inclusive of the physical and emotional body. This gift can shift communities forward in a holistic form of care. With so many persons bearing wounds, of the seen and unseen nature, the act of healing goes well beyond the walls and boundaries of any church wall; it invites us to be the conduits of God's grace in various local contexts. Henry Nouwen, would name us as being part of the 'wounded healers'. What could this look like to us? Healthy Living for Seniors, WAGS, UCAF, Coffee Mornings, Sunday Morning Fellowship after our Worship, visiting people who no longer are able to come to church or the social groups, and if we can get our Meeting Place Missional Activity going later in the year we are meeting and embodying our encounters with God in such ways, we open the pathways for Christ's love to grow and flourish in our neighbourhood. When we do this, we are showing that despair isn't the answer, life-giving and faithful hope replaces it – and healing begins. If you want to know more about 'The Meeting Place' then speak to Stephen, Janice, Cheryl, Tim, John or myself after church.

Where faith and hope exist there is an openness to know of the miraculous works which spark a heart and mind to change. People empowered by faith can inspire others, cultivating a relationship of trust and expectation for God to move amongst them – and that would be inclusive of us. We have our own expectations of God. Our faith is a catalyst to work together as one body not as separate units each going our way. If we can do this then perhaps, we can inspire others to do likewise.

When we look at Paul's words from this perspective, our encounter with God becomes a shared experience. As we work in tandem with God's love being our driving force, our spiritual gifts are being used as intended by the Spirit. Once again, I say, we are called to be a faithful and trusting community, working together as the Body of Christ. Encouragingly, Paul reminds us that all these gifts working together are intended to elevate the collective good, bridging gaps within the faith community and our neighbourhoods.

Finally, our encounters with God can reshape not just our hearts but also our relational environments, making them places where the warmth of Christ's love and grace is a shared experience in the forms of the different spiritual gifts being used by each member in the relationship. As the body of Christ reflects who we are in our diversity of gifts we are unified in our acknowledgement of the need to encourage Christ's spirit of love and service.

If we wanted to think about the practical application of Paul's challenge today, we could think well beyond St Ninian's and imagine how God works through us to touch every corner of our various neighbourhoods. We are reminded that we are stewards of God's grace, called to embody that grace generously and to ensure that our encounters with God spread outward, sharing that the Good News of Christ's resurrection belongs to everyone. Through this understanding, we not only deepen our personal faith journeys but also actively contribute to a world in desperate need of hope, healing and love. In doing so, we fulfill the call to be the hands and feet of Christ, revealing that Christ is present in every act of love and service.

We are called to look beyond the dark spaces of our limited individuality, and search for the One who created the strings, and hammers, which make the beautiful sounds when played together, that come from the gifted player who continues to play.

Amen