

I'd heard the expression, 'may you live in interesting times,' without knowing where it came from and after a little research I discovered its origins aren't all that clear.

As a community we live in interesting times. There are some major issues facing us.

1. A group has been meeting to discuss buildings, partly in relation to the consequences of the Christchurch earthquakes and partly looking to possible future configurations. They'll be reporting to the next church meeting – it's difficult but they're persevering.
2. The search committee appointed earlier in the year continues its deliberations.

In some respects these are minor issues compared with the troubles of the world we live in and in the light of our stated long term desire to continue the world of Jesus in this world.

Next Sunday is Bible Sunday where we'll be given a challenge with regard to the Bible and the following Sunday Ray and Elizabeth James' son-in-law Jay Jury will be speaking. Jay is the lead pastor at a Hillsong congregation in Western Sydney; but earlier he was a local. And before we know it, it will be spring.

Today, something a bit different: **Reading: 1 Kings 3:1-15**

Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

4 The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you.'

6 Solomon answered, 'You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

7 'Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?'

10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 11 So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, 12 I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

From that text, I'd like to focus on three expressions:

SLIDE 4: So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?'

11 So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, 12 I will do what you have asked.

I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

The words discern, discernment, discerning come up 42 times in the NIV version in the pews which is the one I use here and read at home.

Amongst other things the words can mean:

Discern (discerning) – to recognise or find out; to distinguish with difficulty something either by sight or in other ways

Discernment – the ability to judge well

That's what Solomon asked for; that's what God gave him – sadly only God kept his side of the agreement.

Discernment is mentioned in the Joseph account in Genesis 41. Joseph is speaking as we read:

33 'And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt....'

37 The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. 38 So Pharaoh asked them, 'Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?'

39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.'

There are other places in the Old Testament where discern, discernment appear – particularly in the wisdom books of Job, Psalms and Proverbs. If this was a lecture I'd go through them all but this is a brief introduction to Communion.

This family of words comes up in the New Testament four times - all in Paul's letters:

1 Corinthians 2:14: The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

Philippians 1:9-10: 9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,

1 Corinthians 11:29: For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

1 Corinthians 11:31: But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.

So we have two examples from the Old Testament of people to whom God gave discernment; we come to the awareness that the Holy Spirit enables us to discern things that are of God; and that as we love we may be able to discern what's best, pure and blameless as we prepare to meet Jesus when we die or should we be around for the climax of the age when he comes.

The other verses refer to communion which we will share in shortly.

The reason I raise this today is because of the need for us to discern what the Lord God is saying to us, particularly as we face the issues I've mentioned and others.

In 2012 Lynne Baab published a book 'Joy Together' with the subtitle spiritual practices for your congregation. She mentions 6 spiritual practices:

Thankfulness
Fasting
Contemplative Prayer
Contemplative Approaches to Scripture
Hospitality
Sabbath

I'd like us to talk more about spiritual practices but not today. These are only 6 of many that could be mentioned. Lynne then has a chapter on Spiritual Practices and Congregational Discernment.

It spoke to me about the need we have to discern what the Lord's call is to this particular community. As we move into a new season; as we prepare and plan for this, significant questions are:

What is God's heart for this congregation?
Where do we believe God is leading our congregation?
How can we be part of this?

Lynne then talked about another way to discover as a community:

- By being willing to speak what we think we might be hearing from God;
- To listen carefully to others;
- To be able to summarise what we hear others saying;
- To make sure quieter people have the opportunity to speak
- Pause from time to time to pray and reflect.

I found all this very helpful and I feel sad thinking about some church meetings I've been part of over the decades.

What Lynne says is that to prepare for constructive discussions and discerning meetings it is much more helpful when members of the community practice the things I've mentioned. And that's the challenge to be the people of God; not a business.

To conclude we are to **discern** the body of Christ; we are to **discern** ourselves as we come.

1. Discern in this context means to arrive at a right estimate of the character or quality of the body of Christ. The fault Paul condemned was the practice of regarding these gatherings as opportunities for individual indulgence, and not as community assemblies. They didn't estimate such gatherings as being 'together' meetings; they didn't see themselves as members of the common body.
2. If we discern ourselves - If we examine ourselves, if we exercise some scrutiny over our feelings, and conduct, and come to the Lord's Table with a proper spirit, we should escape the condemnation to which they are exposed who observe it in an improper manner.

PRAYER