

## Making Sense 1 Corinthians 14:6-25

Have you ever been in a place where the people around you spoke a language you didn't understand?

Maybe it's on **a foreign holiday**. Everything is okay until you disembark from the plane. And then it hits you. I'm not talking about the heat. But the strangeness. The differences. The **sense of isolation** and **exclusion** because you've no idea what the locals are talking about.

Or maybe it was when **you last drove to Scotland**. Everything was fine just south of Gretna Green. And then it all changed. From this point on the natives open their mouths but nothing seems to make sense. Which of course leaves us with the only strategy that gives us a hope of survival – nod your head and smile and hope you'll right more than 50% of the time! Now, of course, if you're a Scot watching this, I'm pretty sure this is how you feel every time you venture into the land of the English.

**The truth is that nobody likes to feel left out.** We love to belong and we love to feel included. However, when the people around us don't speak **intelligible** words the result is terrible. But when they do, the result is beautiful.

This brings me to the big point I want to show us this morning from **1 Corinthians 14. Everything we do as we gather as a church needs to be intelligible.**

Please don't misunderstand me.

Being **intelligible** doesn't mean we all need to be part of Mensa with super high IQ's. Or that we all need first class honours degrees from a top university. No, being **intelligible** means that what we do and what we say makes sense to people, regardless of whether they believe it or not.

And this is one of the big themes of 1 Corinthians chapter 14.

Listen to verse 6. **Read verses 6 to 9.**

Or what about verse 18. Listen to this. **Read verses 18 and 19.**

Here's my question for us as we ponder what we've just heard. **Why does Paul have to write such an obvious truth?** Surely it's self-evident that what we do in church must be intelligible? Why would any Christian choose to do something that leads to confusion and misunderstanding in the church?

**Friends, they were doing it in Corinth!**

What was happening was that some people who had been given the good spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, that is speaking to God from their hearts in a heavenly language, well some of these people thought it was okay to do this whenever they wanted, regardless of whether the people around them could understand what they were saying.

**Why?** They prized their individual experience of God above all else. What did it matter what was happening around them as long as they were having a great time.

Our precise issue in 21<sup>st</sup> century Scarborough at Trinity Church is not uninterpreted public tongue speaking. **But here's the reality we do face.** Here is where the rubber hits the road. We live in a country that prizes personal experience everything else. And **because of this** we are in danger of not having a faith that impacts our mind.

I'm sure you see this all the time. There is a keen desire to escape the **stresses** and **strains** of modern life. The hope of finding a different place which provides **calmness** and **peace**. It's what many call their happy place.

Your happy place may look very different from someone else's. But here's what everyone is hoping they will provide: **a personal experience that is emotionally rich.**

This kind of **consumerist passion** can certainly creep into how we view the purpose of corporate worship. Friends, **we face a double danger.**

**First**, we are tempted to focus solely on what **I** can get out of it and what is provided for **me**.

**Second**, we can develop a view that says the only important aspect of what happens when we gather is **how I feel**. And if I don't feel good then how can it be good?

Now again please don't misunderstand me. The Christian faith is deeply enriching for our emotions. And it is beneficial for our emotional wellbeing. The truth of the Bible stirs our passions and increases our joy. But not at the expense of our minds.

Or in other words, **we are to be connected Christians**.

Our minds, our emotions and our will should all be engaged as we worship God.

This means that **our corporate worship must be intelligible**. What we do must make sense to the people around us.

Let me suggest **four** implications of this.

**First**, this means there can be no uninterpreted tongue speaking in a church service, even if the person praying is having a wonderful time.

**Second**, this means that we shouldn't really quietly speak in tongues to ourselves if we are in a small group that is praying. Nobody else can understand what you are saying and it can be a big distraction to the person who is praying. So why not keep quiet, listen, pray in your heart and give a big amen at the end?

**Third**, this means we should explain what we are doing so that those not familiar with church can understand why we say a confession and a creed and why we read the Bible. **Little explanations make things intelligible**.

**Fourth**, this means our preaching should be in straightforward language. This doesn't mean we should dumb down the message of the Bible. I'm not talking about taking us back to the **spiritual crèche**.

No I am talking about how we can be **simple without being simplistic**. I'm talking about how we can be straightforward with our language so **everyone** in the congregation can understand what is being said.

**Many of us will know that the New Testament was written in Greek**. But did you know that back in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century there were two different kinds of Greek. There was the Greek spoken and written by the intellectuals. And there was something called **Koine Greek**, that is the Greek spoken by the people. Do you which Greek the New Testament was written in? Not the Greek of the intellectuals but the Greek of the people. **God wants his word to be understood by everyone!**

We all know how important it is to be motivated if we want to keep on doing things that are good for us. **I was out jogging the other day** and the final leg of my route home involved running up a steep hill. What kept me going? The prospect of arriving home. I needed motivation to keep me doing the thing that was good for me.

We've already seen that God wants our corporate worship to be intelligible. So let me end with **two reasons** to help us do this more and more.

The **two E's** of intelligible worship:

- Edification
- Evangelism

### **First, edification**

This is a just posh word that means that other people are built up in their faith by what you do. This is what Paul mentions in verse 17 when he talks about someone in a church service speaking in tongues without interpretation. **Read verse 17**.

You see other people cannot be edified because they have no idea what is being said. However, if things are intelligible, if they make sense to the people around us then the followers Jesus will be edified. We will see our brothers and sisters built up in the faith. So let's be motivated to keep on striving to be an intelligible church.

## Second, evangelism

Listen to what Paul says in verse 23. **Read verses 23 to 25.**

As we approach Christmas there are two outreach ideas that we are keen to promote:

**Christmas Concerts** – like a carol service but without congregational singing. We aim to do four of these on the Sunday before Christmas.

**Christmas Cards** – everyone to send Christmas Cards and include their testimony in each one. We'd help each other to write one.

It's good to think of creative ways to tell people about Jesus but this passage reminds us that a normal church service that is **intelligible** is a great place for non-Christians to attend. This is not only because they get to encounter **a community of love** but because they will hear **a message of grace**.

**Let's pray.**