

Sunday 25th August 2024

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Readings John 6:60-69 ([CEV](#))
 1 Thessalonians:4-8 ([CEV](#))
 1 Corinthians 12:4-20, 25, 26 ([CEV](#))

Reflection

Today in our church we are working on the section of our Church Life Review which explores our mission and outreach. We will celebrate what we are doing, learn from what we have done and imagine what we might do next. There is a challenge in being a church and sometimes we shy away from that challenge, as we read some of the early disciples did when Jesus tried to explain his place and role in creation. It was a wrestling that often happened in the early church and Paul addresses many challenges in his letters to the churches he had visited. It is a wrestling that goes on today in our churches, particularly as we grow in age and don't have a next generation to whom to pass the responsibilities. However whilst the responsibility remains the way we meet that responsibility can change.

Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians reminds us that being church is all about outreach and mission and we must never forget that, especially when we are tempted to focus on buildings and structures. Churches do not need buildings and if a church is blessed with a dedicated building there is a responsibility to use it creatively in our quest to fulfil our outreach and mission. If all we do is let out the building to other groups to pay for the upkeep of the building then we are fooling ourselves about the reality of being church. Few of the early churches would have had a dedicated building so there was little temptation to see church as a building, church was and remains a group of disciples following the way of Jesus in their everyday lives.

There are three aspects to being church, fellowship, outreach and mission, these should be the core of what we do.

Fellowship: social activities we share together and with family and friends such a quiz nights, beetle drives or celebrations. These are about getting to know one another more deeply.

Outreach: activities designed to encourage wider participation from within the community, coffee mornings, Christmas Tree Festivals, the friendship cafes, Parent and Toddler Group, Re-engage afternoon teas, and the way we use our noticeboards, walls and windows. Outreach is about invitation, the invitation to question, think and explore a different approach to life in a gentle non threatening way. We need to use our imagination and creativity in our outreach to those around us.

Mission: how we engage with the needs in our communities and seek to make a difference, supporting other organisations in their activities through participation, raising awareness or fundraising. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of church life, it requires imagination, dedication and commitment to the make a real difference in the lives of others.

When we gather for worship we are gathering to give thanks for the presence of God in our lives, thanks for the inspiration of God's Spirit which fires our imagination and pushes us on in our journey, and to praise God for the wonders of creation of which we are a part. We gather to learn from each other, encourage each other and discern our path together as we seek to make a difference in the world. Worship is a recharging of our batteries but it can also be a place of wrestling as we come to understand the challenges and find a way to meet them.

It is all about togetherness, and an expression of our oneness in God. In our reading from Corinthians we hear Paul's approach to how to encourage church life and togetherness. What are your gifts? Have you taken time to recognise your gifts and do you own them through the grateful thanks of using them for the life of the church? We should not be ashamed of our gifts, or deny them through misunderstood humility. Instead if people praise you acknowledge that you are simply using a God given gift. Sometimes we overlook gifts, thinking they are nothing to do with church, and yet church is about the whole of life. Any passion or skill has a place in the life of the church we simply have to discover that place and incorporate the passion or skill into our outreach, any talent can be used creatively in the life of the church.

There is a responsibility to own, acknowledge and use our gifts given by God. They are a part of who we are and can make a difference to others. There is also a responsibility to help each other recognise gifts and that means getting to know one another better. Church is community and an expression of a commitment to the care and spiritual welfare of each other. Our gifts also play a part in our sense of belonging, recognising what we have to give to the body helps us see ourselves as part of the body.

The integrity of the body is a bit like a pyramid of people each standing on the shoulders of others, we are supported and we support. It takes balance and concentration and is about relationships just as the functioning of the body is about relationships. To be church we need to value each other, know each other and commit to working together, knowing we all have a part to play. Over time that part may evolve or change, we may use a different gift or a gift differently but we always have a part to play. If one person in the pyramid has a wobble then those around must hold tighter to protect the integrity of the pyramid, the same should happen in church, we extend our role until the person is able to regain their strength. When we work together then from the outside the wobbles are hidden, if we don't support each other then the pyramid falls. When we don't work together then are we fully engaging in the life and witness of the church?

In almost every initiative there are a variety of roles which need to be filled, from serving refreshments, advertising, organising, shopping, clearing up, to conversation with visitors and prayer support. There will be a role for anyone in our new ventures. There is a real opportunity to include everyone in being church: the walkers, the talkers, the givers, the receivers, the mobile and the housebound. We are all church and we all have a role. The role may change over time but there is always a role, what is yours?