

Traditional Home service
Sunday 14th January
Epiphany 2

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by
the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Let us return to the Lord our God and
say to him:

*Father, we have sinned against heaven
and against you. We are not worthy to be
called your children. We turn to you
again. Have mercy on us, bring us back
to yourself as those who once were dead
but now have life through Christ our
Lord.
Amen.*

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the
name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to
God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms,
hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*Be Thou My Vision*)

READINGS - 1 Samuel 3.1-10
Ephesians 4:7-16
John 1.43-end

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth. I believe in
Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who
was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of
the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius
Pilate, was crucified, died, and was
buried; he descended to the dead. On
the third day he rose again; he ascended
into heaven, he is seated at the right
hand of the Father, and he will come to
judge the living and the dead. I believe in
the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness
of sins, the resurrection of the body, and
the life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*Spend some time praying for our nation,
our community and our families.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your
name, your kingdom come, your will be
done, on earth as in heaven. Give us to-
day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver
us from evil. For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours, now and for
ever. **Amen.**

HYMN 2 (*O Jesus, I have Promised*)

CONCLUSION

God of glory,
you nourish us with your Word
who is the bread of life:
fill us with your Holy Spirit
that through us the light of your glory
may shine in all the world.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ
our Lord.
Amen.

Hymns to use

Be Thou My Vision

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou
art Thou my best thought, by day or by
night Waking or sleeping, Thy presence
my light

Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true
word I ever with Thee and Thou with me,
Lord Thou my great Father, and I Thy
true son Thou in me dwelling and I with
Thee one

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and Thou only first in my heart
High King of heaven, my treasure Thou
art

High King of heaven, my victory won
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright
heaven's sun Heart of my own heart,
whatever befall Still be my vision, O ruler
of all

Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all

O Jesus, I have Promised

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve Thee to the end;
be Thou forever near me,
my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if Thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if Thou wilt be my Guide.

O let me feel Thee near me,
the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but, Jesus, draw Thou nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear Thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or controul!
O speak, and make me listen,
Thou Guardian of my soul!

O Jesus, Thou hast promised
to all who follow Thee
that where Thou art in glory
there shall Thy servant be;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve Thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Master and my Friend!
Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Sermon - Adrian Morton
Sabbatical thoughts on Ephesians 4

I want to share some more about our sabbatical thinking.

I went into our sabbatical wanting to look at Ephesians 4.

It's a subject that I've looked at a little bit over the years, but never felt I had the time or space to devote much thinking to it.

The letter to the Ephesians is seen by a number of scholars to be a template about how the church, the body of Christ should function.

Eugene Peterson on Ephesians:

"It provides our best access to what is involved in the formation of church..."

Other letters in the NT tend to focus on a specific pastoral problem or situation.

Whereas the letter to the Ephesians is seen to be more generic than that.

And we get these great statements about the church:

"you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household..."

... In him (Christ) you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit."

"Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms."

And so the body of Christ, the church, is a new community of people created by God to be both a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

But also a vehicle through which the Holy Spirit works to ensure God's eternal purposes are worked out.

Sometimes when we rock up on a Sunday morning, when we gather as His people

maybe in a small group, it doesn't feel like that does it!

But the church, the people of God, has that high calling.
Jesus loves His church.

In Eph 5 Paul compares Christ and the church to a husband and wife relationship.

The part of Ephesians I was particularly interested to look at in starts at 4:7:

"To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it..."

then it goes on in verse 11...

"It was he (*Christ*) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, **so that the body of Christ** may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and **become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.**

So for the church, the people of God, to become all that it is meant to become:

prepared for works of service, built up, mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ...

For that to happen, then the people of God, the body of Christ needs all those gifting to be active in some way.

We need the apostolic.
We need the prophetic.
We need the evangelistic.
We need pastors and teachers.

Now when I look at the Church of England, I don't think we understand this very well.

In all my training, this never was looked at.

Actually, I have a meeting with the Bishop next month to talk about my sabbatical, so we'll chat about it!

But the Church of England tends to appoint those who are primarily pastors, shepherds.

Men or women who are gifted to care for the flock and provide a level of feeding for the flock.

So as well as being a pastor (and we call them priests), he or she will be able to teach to some degree.

And we need those gifts, they are a good thing.

But the point is, if the other gifts aren't in evidence, then the body of Christ won't function as it should.

This text says all are involved... "to prepare God's people for works of service, **so that the body of Christ** may be built up, etc etc"

Think about your own body.

if your digestive system works a treat, but your immune system doesn't.
Ultimately your body won't be healthy.
We need all things working well.

In the recent past the Church of England has kind of managed to muddle through because Great Britain has more or less been a Christian country.

We've lived through Christendom...
Christendom basically describes a territory or nation where Christianity is a vital part of the people's lives.

It is where the people live under a set of Christian morals and values.

That just is not the case anymore.

Statistically Great Britain is not a Christian country.

In a 2022 survey

48% of the population described themselves as 'Christian' of which 6% described themselves as 'practising Christians'.

Most people now don't have a natural connection with the 'church' anymore.

And what we are seeing is the Christian church in this country is dwindling.

But it's not hard to see what will happen when only the gifts of pastor and teacher are prominent.

You will get increasingly smaller churches, who may feel well cared for, and gaining in some knowledge.

But there are no pioneers, people breaking new ground for the Gospel.
Planting new churches... if that is what the apostolic gifting does.

It is more than that, but for now let's say that is their primary role.

There are no prophetic people saying, "this is what's on the Lord's heart for this church at the moment... walk that way..."

There are no evangelists who are gifted in gathering people to the cause of Christ.

So it is no wonder the church will dwindle...

We've set ourselves up to get smaller!

More than that though, if we understand this Ephesians passage as being a template for how the church should function.

Then a church that operates only with a pastor/teacher model, is a dysfunctional church.

It isn't operating rightly...

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Now, there are several churches that take this passage and try and form a leadership team with all these gifts evident.

The idea being it is the leadership team that will equip the rest of the church to do the works of service etc etc..

But, actually the passage says this:

"To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it..."

Or more literally, "to each and every one grace has been given..."

So this isn't just about leadership.
Some people will be called to leadership...

But actually this is for everyone in the church.

Everyone is called to operate out of these gifts and also to equip others to discover and use these gifts.

So the passage is about discipleship, its about ministry..
How we are all being discipled...

The passage says is about become mature as Christians.
Growing into the likeness of Christ.

Elsewhere in Ephesians, 5:12, Paul says:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children

In Romans 8, he says:

For those whom he foreknew, he also pre-destined to be conformed to the image of his Son

What does it mean to imitate God?
What does it mean to be conformed to the image of His Son?

Well, wasn't Christ the archetypical Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd & Teacher.

He modelled all those gifts perfectly.
Those functions describe him.

So to become more Christ like, we are all to grow in all those gifts.

Previously when I've thought of this passage, I've tended to think that if you have an evangelistic gift you haven't got to worry too much about growing in any of the others.

But to become more Christ like, we are all to grow in all those gifts.

So as I say, it's really about discipleship for the whole church.

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And its not particularly focussed around our gathering on a Sunday.

I still believe gathering for a Sunday celebration is important.

Its a place to worship together, to focus on the presence of God...

< a few years ago someone used to come to Wollaston and he offered to run the laptop. He was, and still is, a high level civil servant. He attends meetings at the cabinet, with high level politicians.... and I've asked him to run the laptop.

Which on one hand is very servant hearted, but I couldn't help wonder whether his undoubted gifts weren't be well used!

I bumped into him last year and he again told me how stressed he used to get trying to ensure the words were being put up in the right order! He'd get more stressed about that than some of the meetings he went to!>

Ephesians 4 is about both being discipled as people to be more Christ like wherever we are.

In the cabinet office, in the boardroom, in the class room...

And to be involved in discipling others to grow to be more Christ like.

Here's another thought I've been wrestling with...

If Christ is the archetypical Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd & Teacher.

And if Christ reflects perfectly the nature of God.

Which Hebrew Ch 1 says:

Verse 3 says "He (Christ) is the exact likeness of God's own being."

And if people are made in the image of God, then its not too big a jump to say these gifts - Apostles, Prophet, Evangelist Shepherd, Teacher are already in the world.

Because they are part of God's image...

And actually we see it...

How many times do we read about some entrepreneur, who has started 4 new business before the age of 18.

Some people seem naturally made to break new ground, start new things..

Steve Jobs, Richard Branson... they probably have strong apostolic gifting...

How many people do we know who just seem natural at caring for people.

People who find it easy to build community around them.

They have a strong shepherd or pastor gifting...

What Ephesians is saying that Christ has redeemed these gifts and given them to the church.

So discipleship becomes the task of discovering these gifts that are already there.

And using them for God's glory.
Using them as the people of God, bringing glory to Jesus.

In our Gospel reading, we hear about the calling of the first disciples.

These people left much to follow a man, who turned out to be more than a man.

They were captivated by Jesus.

At the end of the Gospels Jesus famously says:

"Go and make disciples of all nations,"

I think Ephesians 4 gives us a lens to look through when we consider how to make disciples.

CONCLUSION

Where do we go from here...

Well as you have hopefully heard, its about working to create a culture of discipleship.

I've been encouraged by a number of words given at the start of this New Year.

A couple have been about 'something new being birthed in the church'.

One about journeying into the unknown!

I'm connecting with various church leaders who are further down this path. That's where I was last week.

I want to understand better both the processes churches have gone through.

And the fruit churches have seen.

For us here, I just want to start talking about this with more people.

If you are vaguely excited about what you have heard, I would love to talk more to you about it.

I realise that some people get excited about something new even when they are not sure what that new thing looks like.

Others need to see what that new thing looks like before they get excited!

And that is really fine!

On thing I really don't want to forget, is to have that continued reliance on the Holy Spirit.

That continued emphasis on worship and the presence of God.

I'm so grateful to our worship teams and the sound team that mean we can come and freely worship each Sunday.

Amen!