

Acts 1:15-17,
21-end
John 17:6-19

The reading from Acts reminded me of a church AGM. It was the first business meeting of the early church and like us at the moment they were a person short, since Judas was no longer one of them. Unlike us, sadly, there was a choice of candidates for the job.

That's where the similarity ends of course as Judas had been found to be a traitor and the last person to move on from Christ Church and Newsholme was a good and faithful servant and a friend to many.

And the early church didn't have to wait for someone to respond to an advertisement; the church nominated two people themselves.

I think I might offer this model of recruitment to the diocese and see how they respond.

So, in Acts we observe how the practicalities and structure of church life is decided, whereas in John we begin to grapple with the spiritual consequences of belonging to a Christian community.

How do we understand the declaration of Jesus that we are his glory?
What do we understand by the glory of God?
How do we demonstrate our belief in the glory of God?

The glory of God is not something that can be announced with trumpets and great splendour – the glory of God is seen in the everyday. We pray thy Kingdom come as though we are waiting for some momentous sign that the Kingdom of heaven is come to earth. God's Kingdom is here on earth now. Our mission is not to pry for God's Kingdom to come but for The Holy Spirit to empower us in advancing that Kingdom where we are"

God's glory is not something far away for us to admire. The glory of God is with us in the everyday. To quote Steven Cottrell, who is the Archbishop of York, in his broadcast on the first day of the church's prayer initiative , Thy Kingdom Come, "God is with us in the everyday, and that is scandalous to

some people, people who want to put God on a pedestal and admire his glory from afar.”

That is not the God with whom we live and worship.

The glory of God is seen in his character and presence.

Jesus was the example of God’s glory and because his disciples followed and obeyed and believed, the glory of God was revealed by the way they lived their lives and God was present in the world through them.

So far so good!

Now the difficult bit, how much of God’s glory do our lives reveal to the world?

Jesus prays that the disciples be united in love and harmony. What does that mean? The prayer is that the disciples be united in love and harmony as the Father, Son and Spirit are united. Easy to say but what does it really mean to be united as one?

It’s so much more than thinking of ourselves as family and caring for each other – although of course that is important, it (being one) means supporting Christian people and non Christian people world wide, the Church with a capital C.

Involving ourselves in every aspect of mission that we are connected with. The M.U. Is a perfect example of demonstrating the love of God world wide. We do not talk enough about the work of God achieved by the M.U. it is so much more than simply meeting together to chat and enjoy each others company, although that too is important.

As I am writing these words I am being convicted of my own failings in so many areas of life. Once we give our lives to Jesus we are at the start of a new way of living and if we truly commit to that new way of life, then we experience what it means to be filled with joy.

Verse 13

And now I am coming to you. I have told them many things while I was with them so that they would be filled with my joy.

The next difficult bit is understanding what “ to be filled with joy” actually means.

In my early days of trying to understand what being a Christian actually entailed I remember being very upset because I didn't feel joyful all the time. I was quite confused when my Vicar of the time laughed. It took me a while to realise being filled with God's joy doesn't necessarily mean a feeling of continual celebration but the knowledge of living in intimate relationship with Christ. The understanding deep within that God is caring for us and even in the darkest of days is supporting and strengthening us to continue.

Of course living with this knowledge can sometimes seem to alienate us from the people we live among. Living as an example of God's love in the world can mean our values often differ so much from those we interact with, even family who we love dearly can sometimes feel, to us, to be living in an alien world – which often they are!

Jesus does not ask the Father to take his disciples out of that alien world but to protect them from being influenced by the world's changing values. This is where the spiritual battles take place. It's so much easier to keep quiet when we are challenged by actions or words which do not lead to harmony and love. We can be hesitant to offer an opinion that will more than likely result in being ridiculed – and the spiritual battle is keeping our sense of God with us and not resorting to feeling hurt or annoyed. (This is my particular battle a lot of the time). We are called, like the early disciples to be salt and light. Sounds easy, it can prove to be anything but.

Jesus' great desire as he prepared to leave his friends was that they would remain unified in each other as they were unified in him. These early disciples had a great task, called to spread the word of God world wide.

So many years later we have the same task, our salt may have become weaker as it's sat in the rain. Our light may be a bit dimmer as the battery begins to flag. Am I on my own here or do others feel that way too?

What is the answer?

Prayer, prayer and more prayer. Time in the quiet waiting on the Holy Spirit is far from wasted time. This is the time our batteries are re-charged and our salt is replenished.

We are in a place of uncertainty, and certainly of waiting as we continue to seek a new vicar. We are praying that God is preparing the right person for us, but perhaps we should be praying that God is preparing us for the right person.

A new vicar usually brings change and sometimes this can cause dissension in the ranks but Jesus' prayer is that we will be as one, unified in love, acceptance, forgiveness and eager to be his example in the world.

When we sing
a new commandment I give unto you,
That you love one another as I have loved you.

We spend a few minutes reflecting on what that actually means for us.

That you love one another as I have loved you.